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JOHN MONTCALM, HERETIC

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HILLDALE.

John Montcalm, Heretic

A Tale of the Maryland Hills

BY
FREDERICK A. RUPP, M. D.

ILLUSTRATED.

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DEDICATED

To my father, who lived a
life of devotion and
self-sacrifice to
truth.

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JOHN MONTCALM, HERETIC.

John Montcalm, Heretic.

CHAPTER I.

THE preparations for his home-coming were completed; the little parsonage, a model of cleanliness and neatness, almost religiously prim and neat, had been scoured and scrubbed from top to bottom, inside and outside. Saturday was always a busy day for the village, and no family in the village was more busy than that of the minister, the minister at work in the study, his wife and daughter busy with their household duties. This particular Saturday was an unusually busy one; he was coming home, and therefore his room must be prepared for him; his favorite cake must be baked; the little wicker seat under the old oak tree must be prepared for him, his favorite seat under that old oak, the largest and oldest tree in the village, beneath the venerable branches of which many a church festival was held under the supervision

of the minister's wife and daughter, both hard-worked, both slaves of the church.

The minister's Sunday sermon was written, his share of the Saturday cleaning was done, and having finished mowing the parsonage lawn, mowing it as he did with mathematical precision and accuracy, he now walked toward the stable, and as he walked he thought. Hitching up his little mare, Dolly, he started on a three-mile drive to the station; the railroad did not approach the village nearer than three miles. As the minister drove, he thought; at times his face became clouded, clouded in strong contrast to the beauties of nature everywhere around him. The robin had just returned for the summer, his red breast glowing as he sought his mate. It was indeed the season for mating. Nature was in bloom; the fragrance of the honeysuckle was wafted through the atmosphere, and the recent showers made rich the foliage along the country road. Birds and flowers—all but man!—were quickened with the new life of spring, joyous, life-giving spring! Nature, God! God, Nature!! How could anyone be so deaf to the whisperings of his own inner being as to deny the existence of a higher being, a higher power,

when thus surrounded by the generous gifts of God? The human individual who confesses publicly his overflowing love for God must necessarily appreciate, must, indeed, love the handiwork of that same Divine Creator, God.

At times a smile tried to break through the dense clouds which had gathered on the minister's face; but the clouds were too thick and the smile was hidden. Spring joys, spring life, spring beauties, none were for him. In spring it has been said and often proved that men's fancies turn to thoughts of love; in spring, too, men's fancies must turn to thoughts of better things, prompted, as they should be, by a re-awakening of that better part of themselves, that element of the Divine, which exists not only far away in the unknown heavens, but even in man himself. Near to God? Near to nature's heart? When, if not in joyous spring? New life everywhere; the delicate little wild flower nodding to its companions of the field, growing in stature and beauty, growing, always growing; the long stretch of meadow, rich with the warm yellow of the dandelion; the blue violets joyously smiling to those who could respond to their smiles! The minister in his carriage was

deaf to the songs of the birds, he was blind to the language of the flowers. Nature apparently had no place in his thoughts.

The three miles were soon covered and the station was reached. Only a few of the country people had gathered to meet the train; the hack was there to meet a possible passenger and to carry the village mail; one or two others, and the minister. The joviality that was displayed by the few who had gathered at the station seemed to irritate the minister, and, as it was fully fifteen minutes until the train should arrive, he walked up the country road, alone.

"What's ailin' Parson Whittleby?" asked Mr. Hezekiah Johnson, the jolly old hack driver. "He's walkin' out there as though he hain't no keer fur us common folks."

"Maybe his new spring suit doesn't fit him," suggested a bystander, at which remark there was a little laugh. But the old hack driver was not satisfied, and he sought explanation elsewhere.

"I heerd," began old Johnson, "that the parson had sot an old hen with fourteen aggs for which he guv a high price; and law me, when the time cum fur them onery chickens to be

hatched, every dagon agg, exceptin' two, went to corruption,—I think that's the wery word the parson said. And now them two little chickens, they got the gapes, and the parson's kid, the one they call Josie, had heerd how the gapes in chickens is caused by a bug in the throat,—the parson hisself had told Josie it was a parrysite,—and little Josie had sot hisself to fetch out the parrysite with a hook. When the parson seen what Josie was doin' it was too late, and the two chicks had chicked their last. And they say as how them aggs cost as much as three dollars a dozen."

All agreed with Johnson that the loss of those fancy eggs might cause some of the parson's gloom, yet with all the optimism that usually belongs to hack drivers, Johnson, after having fully recovered his breath, began to seek for another cause sufficiently great to throw such gloom over the parson.

"Well, fellers," he said, "I won't never believe that the parson is worrin' over them aggs as wouldn't hatch. I've been heerin' things lately. One of the elders of the parson's church came along down with me one day last week, and he got to talkin'. You orter heerd him talk!

He is a doctor, you know, and a man of right smart learnin'. He talked about things furrin' to me, fur law me, I didn't know nothin' he was chewin' about. From what I heerd, he and the parson was on the outs. Doc said as how he was goin' to think to suit hisself; as how the parson couldn't drive his thoughts through the rebellations of his brain as he drove his horse through the alley back of his house,—them's his werry words. Doc is a right smart one, so he is. He was talkin' about the parson bein' as stale in the cerrybral rebellations of his thinkin' machine as them aggs as wouldn't hatch. Then, agin, I heerd that his son Ralph—"

But at this moment the Reverend Mr. Whittleby arrived upon the scene, and the whistle of the train was heard in the distance. This put an end to the station gossip, and poor old Johnson, hack-driver, mail-carrier and town gossip, choked back what he intended to say about the son Ralph, until he got red in his fat, good-natured face.

With the arrival of the train the clouds on the face of the Reverend Mr. Whittleby scattered for the moment, and a genial smile of welcome played over his features; but it was only

for the moment, for after the very formal greetings his brow assumed its accustomed frown.

"Father, allow me to present to you my friend, Mr. John Montcalm, of whom I have so often written to you in my letters."

"I am sure, Mr. Whittleby, I am pleassd to form your acquaintance; I have been looking forward to this occasion for some time, and now that my anticipations are about to be realized, I look forward to a pleasant and, with you Mr. Whittleby, a profitable vacation."

"Anything done to please a friend of my son, Ralph, will be a pleasure to myself and family. We hope to make your visit in our village a pleasant one. Well, Ralph, we are also glad to welcome you home." After this formal greeting of the two boys, the trio walked to the carriage, all of them closely observed by the little group around the station.

"The tall one," said old Johnson, "is the parson's son. Did I ever tell you how Ralph, when he was a youngster, one time sneaked up in his dad's study? In his study, the parson has a table, and in its drawer he keeps his loose change and sich like. This drawer does not fit tight to the flat top of the table, and Ralphie

crawls up under the table and sticks his little hand into the drawer and hanks out a quarter. Then he goes down to the grocery, old Billy Wilson's, you know, near the old town pump; old Billy told me hisself, as how Ralphie sneaked into the store and says, 'Hey, mister, give me this much of lickrish?' and holds up the quarter. Old Billy says as how he winked to Ed Ganton, who spends all his time loafin' in Billy's store, dagon him, while his little woman takes in washin' for a livin',—as how he winked to Ed, thinkin' that the youngster had stole the money. But Billy gives him the lickrish, and Ralphie smears it all over his face and coat. His hands were black with lickrish. Yes, Ralphie got lick—rish that day," and the old hack-driver chuckled to himself as he finished his story. By this time Johnson had jumped to his seat, and a traveling salesman who had come on the same train as the minister's son and his friend, jumped up beside him, knowing that he would be well entertained by the quaint old hack driver while on the way to the village.

"Well, dad," said the salesman, "here I am again; anything doing in the village these days? How is business?"

"Oh, money is a little skeerce these days. Hain't you heerd how two fields are sot aside at the other end of the willage to bury the starvin' carcasses of peddlers, book agents, and medicine men who strike our willage?"

The traveling man remarked that he thought it would be safer for him to retrace his steps if such were the case, and then inquired about the village itself.

"Well, you see, sir, we think right smart of our little village; we hain't got but five hundred people, and we mostly are honest folks; we pay our debts, take life sort of easy, smoke our pipes and run the chances of hittin' it right in the next world. But I hadn't better talk so big like when the parson is around, fur he gits fightin' mad when he heers us makin' light of things he calls 'religious and sacred.' There he goes now in the kerridge afront of us; he's the one what's drivin'. Him and me ain't on good terms. Once he axed me to forsake the smooth and easy road of un-religiousness and jine his church; I said as how I considered myself as good as some folks as always looks like as if they had just swallowed a green persimmon. I didn't mention no names, but the parson sorter took it

on hisself, and since then he is tellin' town folks that my hack, which I am now drivin' twenty years comin' this December, is a wehickle of sedation, or some sich word like that. Don't know the parson, eh? Well, mebbe you won't keer to know him; no one in the willage knows him; even his little woman that works and slaves for him day and night, don't know him, and his one girl, a purty, buxom one of some twenty years, settles down quiet-like when the Reverend Mr. Whittleby walks up. It seems he is out of sorts with hisself; can't hit it with natur, and a man what can't love and hanker after the things that the good Lord made don't love the Lord what made them either."

Here the hack driver stopped to catch his breath; his companion seemed unwilling to have him thus leave the subject of the minister, and he therefore inquired still further concerning the minister and his family.

"Yes, he do have a little chip of a fellow, a cute youngster, lively as a cricket, too; he must be,—let me see: the day the doctor fetched little Josie was the day I got new wheels for my old hack, and that is now coming close on to nine years and a half. Last summer the young-

sters, he and a few neighbor boys, got together and formed a little drum corps. Well, it was funny to see them barefooted—we called them 'The Silver Foot Drum Corps'—youngsters march around the willage of a hot summer afternoon, beatin' their drums and blowin' their chestnut whistles. Brrum—brrum—brrum—brrum—brrum—they marched down the street, their little feet most blisterin' in the hot sand. The huckster man told them one day that the city drummer chaps had bright tin fifes, so they began to hanker after tin fifes. Did they get them? Well, I should snicker, and listen as to how they done it. They printed little papers on some of Josie's dad's sermon paper, and these little papers told us big folks to come to a festible and buy cakes and sich things; the money, you know, was to go for their new tin fifes. The festible was to be on Saturday afternoon, and on the Friday before all the youngsters, Josie and all the rest, get their ma's big baskets, and they go around to the ladies, and ask them fur cakes fur the festible; the kids know when the womenfolks bake cakes and have them a-plenty. Well, Josie took his basket home; it was heepin' full of cakes got from his pa's church people. Mebbe

his dad thinks to hisself that if his church people gives so many cakes then they won't pay to his salary—that's what they say donation parties be fur any way—well, Josie argyed with his pa, but it wasn't no use, and instead of Josie goin' to the festible, Josie went to bed. No, I guess he didn't go willin.' But the other boys took Josie's things to the festible, and they got their tin fifes, and they play real smart, too. I reckon the parson don't like the drum-corps music, ha, ha!"

The horses lazily crawled up the hill which led to one end of the village; the minister's carriage had just entered the town, and was now beyond the sight of the occupants of the hack.

"Well, Dad," again began the driver's companion, "you do not give the parson much of a reputation. Who were the two young men in the carriage with the minister?"

"Did you see them broad shoulders which most kivered the other two from sight as the kerridge drove afront of us? Did you see the head of black hair what belonged to them broad shoulders? What a swagger, sich as no other fellow in the willage kerries! Didn't you see

THE HILL WHICH LEADS TO THE ONE END OF THE VILLAGE.

afore the parson and the other two got into the kerridge at the station how them broad shoulders and that black head riz high above the reverend hisself just like a young rooster when he crows for the first time? That fellow, sir, is Mister Ralph Whittleby, the son of the Reverend Mister Henry Whittleby. The little fellow with the light fuzz on the top of his head is a friend—I think as how they call him a college chump of Ralph's who shall be wisitin' the parson's family. I hain't heerd the name yet, but they say as how he ain't to be trusted; the parson didn't keer so much to have his son,—he thinks a heap of his son, Ralphie,—bring him along home for his vacation. The parson was tellin' old Deacon Smith—an onrier, a meaner, a stingier cuss can't be found than pious old Deacon Smith—as how he didn't want no unorphodox skeptic sneakin' around his house, spoilin' his Ralphie; them's his werry words. Spoilin' his Ralphie! Hain't you ever heerd how his son Ralph Whittleby?—" but at this point the hack and its occupants had reached the town, and old Johnson was hailed by a street loafer who asked him if he would give him a lift up to the post office. The con-

versation was abruptly thus terminated, and the hack soon reached its destination, the village drug store, in a little corner of which was stowed away the post office boxes. The usual crowd had gathered in the store, awaiting the mail; the postmaster and druggist, also town justice, three persons in one, not counting the many other little oddities that combined to form this important town personage, was having his usual troubles sorting the mail, and at the same time trying to keep some semblance of order among the village boys who would usually meet at the store at mail time.

In the meantime the carriage of the minister was also making its way to the village. Conversation in the carriage was not so brisk as it was in the old hack. Questions were asked by the father and cautiously answered by the son; questions were asked by the son and answered in monosyllables by the father. John Montcalm, the third party of the group, appeared to be the only one of the three at ease; he closely observed both father and son; he noticed the strong resemblance between the two, noticed with what a hopeful gaze the father studied his offspring, as though the

hope, the aim, the ambition of his life were stored up somewhere in his son. The gaze of father to son was an open, frank one; his sincere desire for his son's welfare was written plainly on his face. The son cautiously observed his father; he noticed that his hair had turned more gray, his face more deeply furrowed with wrinkles than when he had left for college the previous fall. He could easily detect the lines on his father's face which spoke of worry and anxiety.

The hack-driver had given a true description of Ralph Whittleby; he was a broad-shouldered, tall, straight, manly looking fellow. With the exception of a small scar that he carried above his left eye as the result of a pitched battle, in which as a child he supported his father's opinions as against the opinions of the slanderous crowd of boys around him, using his fists as his only and best arguments, his complexion was perfect; dark hair and eyes; a sensuous look played around his mouth. The scar above his eye was an important part in the revelation of the character that was hidden behind his face; it was said by the school children that they could foretell any coming anger

in Ralph Whittleby's face by the reddening of the scar. Indeed, the phrase "as red as Whittleby's scar," was commonly heard in the village. He was a true counterpart of his father in almost every respect; it was said that the boys during the session of school took a keen delight, which became almost diabolical, in bringing the flush to his scar by attacking his father with uncomplimentary remarks. Among the boys at the school he was anything but popular; his coming in their midst generally put a damper on their childish spirits, as it was his desire to lead in their plays with a domineering spirit that was peculiar to him. Early in his boyhood he was especially careful to present a neat appearance; he was not to be found playing with the barefooted village boys, preferring his own company or that of the opposite sex, or of his elders. If he was not popular with the boys, the same thing could not be said with respect to the girls, to whom he was peculiarly attractive; indeed, his relation with the village girls was somewhat masterful, and to him many school girls could attribute their demerits and punishments for throwing notes as well as glances in his direction. With them he was a leading favorite; not

so with the boys. His one strong characteristic was the high regard with which he held from youth up his father and his father's opinions. Attending catechetical lectures at an early age, he was thoroughly imbued with his father's opinions, which opinions later in life became law. His father's stern, puritanical ideas found fruitful soil in the son. He now had grown to manhood, and the characteristics of the boy became those of the man, with only this difference that they became more marked even than in his early life. He was the chief exponent of his father's ideas, which were drawn with accuracy and precision. His father was the leading spirit among the conservative element of his church, and the son followed the father. From his own opinions, the Rev. Mr. Whittleby would not yield one iota; he rather added to the flame of conservatism which threatened to destroy all those who differed with him. With the desire of strengthening his son in this particular direction, he sent him to the college of his own choice; of this college the father was one of the trustees, and he was therefore successful in outlining the policy of the college curriculum according to his own views. It was now from this

college that Ralph Whittleby was returning for his summer vacation, accompanied by his friend, John Montcalm, for whom he had formed, as it seemed, a strong liking.

John Montcalm was the direct opposite of Ralph Whittleby in all respects; small in stature, muscular, though not fleshy; light hair and steel blue eyes. John was regarded only as an ordinarily good-looking fellow, while Ralph was generally considered to be handsome. John was the only child in the Montcalm family; his mother was wealthy; his father, formerly a wealthy cigar manufacturer, was dead, having left his wife and son in comfortable circumstances. Mr. Montcalm died when John was only ten years old. After her husband's death, Mrs. Montcalm, who was a daughter of the president of the college which Whittleby and Montcalm afterwards attended, became a resident of the college town. Mr. Montcalm during his life devoted much of his time and money to philanthropic deeds, in which work he was cheerfully encouraged by his wife. John inherited this liberality both of mind and purse, and at an early age he showed the same tendencies which had made his parents beloved by their

fellow townsmen. Upon her husband's death, Mrs. Montcalm built a memorial library for the college of which her father was president, and in due time her son became a student at the same college. It was while at this college that Ralph Whittleby and John Montcalm met and became close friends. Whittleby was always a welcome guest at the Montcalm residence, which was only a short distance from the college campus. The friendship was a strange one; the two boys being unlike in every particular, many were the conjectures for the reason of the close friendship between "that morose Whittleby and good, jolly Montcalm." Mrs. Montcalm was a generous, motherly little woman, and under her roof and influence it was necessary for even Whittleby to lose his identity. Whittleby was a customary guest of John for the Sunday dinner.

This was the last vacation for the two boys, and after much persuasion John consented to spend part of the summer in the Maryland village, Hilldale, a little town snugly buried among the Maryland hills.

CHAPTER II.

"I DO hope that father will be civil to Ralph's friend during his visit, and that he will not attempt to force his hide-bound views upon Mr. Montcalm. Oh, mother, my dear little mother, I often wonder what I would do if I did not have my dear little mother. Yes, mother, I often wonder what it is all for anyway; I wonder what is the use of anything! It seems to me the more one tries to be good and to do right, the less happy one is. Indeed, dear little mother, I almost waver at times, fearing that my faith is founded upon very poor soil. I—"

"Mary, my child," interrupted her mother, the wife of Reverend Mr. Whittleby, "what is the matter with you that you are speaking in this manner at this time?"

The two women, having finished their day's work, had neatly dressed themselves to receive Ralph and his friend. They were now seated in the shade of the old oak tree waiting for the

carriage which they were expecting at any moment. As the son was like the father, so was the daughter like the mother. The wavy, gray hair of the mother and her kindly looking face, cheerful under all circumstances, gave to her an air of gentle motherhood that appealed to all the members of her husband's church, and made her a favorite of the village as well. The daughter, just twenty years old, was a strong support to her mother in her home duties, and to her father in his church work. Attractive in looks, with a genial, sunny disposition, she led in the social functions of both the church and the village.

Not accustomed to hear such gloomy sentiments from her daughter, Mrs. Whittleby was much surprised at her remarks.

"Nothing, mother," answered Mary; "but I want you to be truthful and answer me: are you happy, always happy with the life you are living? You are married; you have a comfortable home; you have, as it is generally said, an interesting family; you have a husband who is becoming known through his writings beyond the narrow confines of Hilldale. All this is supposed to be entirely sufficient for happiness and contentment. But with all this, yet,

mother dear, are you happy?. Does not a woman want more than a mere home, a family, and a husband who may be winning a name and fame? Ralph is now at college; his letters to you, as you know, are infrequent—too much work is his excuse—and unsatisfactory; at times when our supper dishes are cleared away, and when you have a long evening before you, I may have company or I may be busy with my school work; little Josie, dear little fellow, is in bed. Father is in his study, fortgetful of all else but books, books, books. And, therefore, mother, dear little mother, I ask you, do you not often long for that company of father, that love, which must have been yours in your courtship days? No, mother, don't interrupt me; I may be talking sentimental nonsense, but I can see that in your life there is a vacancy, that there is something wanting, just as I must feel the lack of something in my own life. What is that something if not a husband's and a father's love? Please, mother, forgive me, if I have hurt you, but it pains me to see how lonely you often are; how easily that little vacancy could be filled by a husband's tender caress and the little kiss for which the wife can never be

too old! No, mother, if books and pamphlets, and learned writings are to take the place of a husband's affection, then I say away with books and pamphlets, and learned writings."

The girl was becoming eloquent, but she was interrupted by her mother who had listened thus far with patience.

"But, Mary, your father has his work to do; he has a duty which he owes to the church as well as his duty to the family."

"Mother," interrupted Mary, "did father reach his present position in the church without your aid? Did you not stand by him in your early married life? Were not his battles your battles? When he was a struggling, young minister, stowed away in mission churches, were you not his strongest support and comforter? His duty to his wife and family is the strongest duty he has. Nay, mother mine, it is not a duty, but a privilege for a husband to comfort and love his wife, that wife who has given up her all for him, and also to be a companion and friend as well as a father to his children, who in turn should be taught and trained to be real comforts to their parents as the twilight of their lives approaches."

Mrs. Whittleby had never heard Mary thus speak to her, speaking as she was from the very depths of her soul. She realized the truths of her daughter's statements, but was anxious to turn the conversation into another channel.

"Ralph speaks very well of his friend, Mr. Montcalm, and I hope, Mary, that all shall go well while he is with us. There is not much in the village in the way of entertainment, but, from what Ralph says, both of them are in need of rest after their final examinations. Well, they can rest both their minds and bodies, and I trust that Mr. Montcalm's visit will be mutually pleasant."

"Mother," cried out little Josie from the street, "here they come. Hello, Ralph, hello! Mother and Mary are waiting for you in the yard under your oak tree."

The carriage had now reached the yard, and the three alighted. Ralph caught up Josie and started towards the tree.

"Ralph," said Josie, much excited, "we have been waiting for you; I want you to play marbles with me and help me to build my new horse stable, and, oh, Ralph, we got lots of cake with lots of chocolate on top, and mother

THE SPREADING BRANCHES OF THE OLD OAK TREE.

said, if I am good and don't ask questions, I may sit up longer this evening, and Mary got a new dress, and I am having the nicest time, and we have your seat under the oak fixed up spressly for you. Hello, mother and Mary, here is Ralph!"

Ralph was quite overcome with this childish greeting and prattle; he walked up to the tree and affectionately greeted his mother and Mary. Mr. Whittleby and John Montcalm followed, and, after the formal introductions, all seated themselves under the spreading branches of the old oak tree.

"And now, Ralph," began John Montcalm, "is this the interesting little family group of which I have heard so much? I see they have invaded the sacred precincts of your sanctum sanctorum, as I think you call this favorite spot under this justly famous oak. Indeed, it is quite befitting that I should first meet your family in your holy of holies, an omen of a very pleasant and restful trip, I am sure."

"Mr. Montcalm," replied Mary, "you are right when you show yourself attracted by the restfulness of Hilldale, which will probably be in strong contrast to the strenous life of college

days during examination time. We are, indeed, proud of our little village, its quiet restfulness, its picturesque scenery, and our natural beauties, the least of which is not this dear old oak. I hope that Ralph will generously share with you its quiet shade and solitude, where both of you may busy yourselves in the pages of a good summer novel, or probably work out in detail the intricacies of some problem of that dreadful Calculus, or even amuse yourselves in writing treatises on the old oak tree itself. There now, is not that quite a romantic outlook for a summer vacation ?"

"Quite a pleasant prospect, I am sure," replied John, "and should we need an amanuensis in this work, probably we can persuade Miss Mary Whittleby to apply for the position."

"Depends on the salary offered," answered Mary, laughing.

"Mr. Montcalm, Ralph, and the rest, you will please excuse me ; I must stable Dolly and put away the carriage, after which I have a little work in my study that will occupy me until supper time. Come along, Josie, we shall drive around to the stable."

The minister and Josie departed, and the

rest started to walk towards the house, Ralph with his mother, and John with Mary. The latter two seemed to have struck a sympathetic chord in admiring the beauties which spring had already lavished upon the village for those who could appreciate them.

"Mother," began Ralph, "father does not appear in good health; he seems much older than when I left for college last fall."

"Yes, Ralph, father does seem a little older; his hair is considerably grayer, and he seems to worry a great deal. Ralph, what kind of a fellow is Mr. Montcalm? He seems to be so thoroughly frank and open that one is almost forced to like him; look, he and Mary are talking as if their acquaintanceship were of a much longer duration than only a few minutes. Father has not said anything, but I believe he has heard certain rumors in regard to Mr. Montcalm which I am afraid are the cause of some of his anxiety."

"Why, mother, this is news to me. What rumors with any truth in them could be circulated here in this God-forsaken, deserted old hole concerning John, which could cause father

any anxiety? Some of this infernal old town gossip, I suppose."

"I don't know what the rumors are," replied his mother, "and I don't know how they circulated, but some one said that Deacon Smith is telling it around that you are having a friend visiting you who holds very uncertain views regarding church affairs. That, you know, would vitally affect a man of such calibre as old Deacon Smith, and I am afraid might also cause father a little worry. As for myself, Ralph, I can thoroughly trust you in your choice of friends; I am sure you would not bring any one home with you who in any way would be a discredit to your father and his family."

"Mother, mother, don't talk that way; why should an old cuss like Smith, as mean a man as walks, talk about John when he knows nothing about him. True, John and I do not agree in many of our opinions, but he is an honest, thorough gentleman, and the same thing can not be said of old Smith, hang him!"

"Well, Ralph, you know we must be careful when talking about anything concerning father and his church. For my part, my first impression of Mr. Montcalm is very favorable;

surely there can be no deceit concealed behind that manly, honest-looking face."

By this time the two groups had joined on the porch in front of the house; the porch, almost concealed from public view by the honeysuckle vines, with its wicker benches and chairs, was a model of rustic beauty.

"Mother," said Mary, "Mr. Montcalm tells me that he and Ralph are intimate friends of Marguerite Mason, the daughter of that wealthy old man who has his country home, you know, about a half mile out of the village. They have a beautiful place, and in contrast to their magnificent grounds even our dear old oak fades almost to insignificance. Miss Mason was visiting one of the college professor's families, and Mr. Montcalm and Ralph met her at a reception given in her honor. I am sure if our modest yard becomes tiresome, enough pleasure may be found at the Mason mansion."

CHAPTER III.

SEVERAL weeks had elapsed since John Montcalm's introduction to Hilldale and its quaint society. The two boys had rested from the fatigue of college work and were beginning to grow somewhat restless. The weeks had passed with no particular event occurring to disturb the monotony of village life; it was true, as Mrs. Whittleby had said, that the two boys had made a request upon reaching home that they should be relieved from all sorts of entertainments, at least from that kind of entertainment that would necessarily come with social gatherings. Ralph desired to hold his position at the head of his class in college, and was therefore a hard worker; the position of monitor was given to the class leader, and on the little remuneration that accompanies that position Ralph depended for his extras, his pin money. John was also a hard student; his little body was one large, animated nerve cell, his brain all gray matter; it required only a slight stimulus to

draw excessive response from the active cells of his over-active brain and body. Study and work for him became a passion; and yet for him his college life was not all study, for he was not a poler. John Montcalm was the confidant of the student body; his sympathy was too large to be confined in the narrow recesses of his own little body. Wiry and active, he led in the tennis tournament; his eloquence in speech led his college to success in inter-collegiate oratorical contests; a fluent writer, he was found on the staffs of the various college publications. He was as popular among his fellow-students as Ralph was unpopular. At the college dances he was never conspicuous, though it was on such occasions that Ralph's athletic figure was conspicuous. John's name did not appear on the roll of the college religious organizations, nor of the church in connection with the college. In fact, John was not a church member at all; he was accustomed to say, when asked as to the reason why he would not join church, that he could not subscribe to many of the beliefs and required doctrines of the Church, and therefore why should he become a hypocritical member? He was not a member of the college "Young

Men's Christian Association," though he was an active worker in the college settlement organized among the poor people of the college town. He was not a member of the college prohibition league, though he was temperate in his habits.

A week of enforced rest was sufficient for both boys; the weeks just passed were mostly devoted to rest, but were not entirely devoid of interest. In their rambles the boys had passed the Mason mansion, and they had renewed their friendly relationship with Marguerite Mason, whom they had met at a college reception the previous winter. Marguerite was tall; her light wavy hair dressed en pompadour added to her height, and the little twinkle of her blue eyes as a rule made her the center of an admiring group. She was bright, vivacious, impulsive, but withal she was an innocent minded girl. The only daughter, she was the idol of her parents, and the large, roomy mansion just outside of the village of Hilldale was always ready for the reception and entertainment of her guests.

Marguerite Mason had become attracted by the forceful, strong, yet simple character of Mary Whittleby, and the two had become fast friends. During the week just passed, Ralph

had carried an invitation from his sister Mary to Miss Mason to attend a little company to be given in honor of the two boys. The company was to be given on the following Saturday evening; Marguerite accepted the invitation. She was in a hammock in the yard when Ralph came with the invitation.

"I thank you, Mr. Whittleby, and will you thank your dear little sister for this invitation? Please tell her that I shall surely be there, nothing unforeseen preventing; I suppose I am a little bit superstitious, Mr. Whittleby, therefore I never give an unqualified answer to an invitation; you know we are not always masters our futures. But I hope to enjoy your sister's company."

"Only sister's company?" asked Ralph.

"Well, I suppose you and your friend shall be sufficiently entertaining; college boys generally live up to their reputation. I am just now enjoying a delightful romance," continued Marguerite; "Act I.,—two simple-minded, innocent country people, if you have the patience to listen, Mr. Whittleby,—a boy and a girl had grown up together from youth, filled with pure, honest, simple love. The date for the wedding

was arranged. Act II.—A city fop of unknown character and reputation makes his appearance at a country corn-husking; whence he came, who he was, how he got to the party, no one knew. He finds the ear of red corn, and I suppose you know, Mr. Whittleby, the privilege that goes with an ear of red corn at a corn-husking. Well, Mr. Unknown also knew; his choice was the sweetheart of our country bumpkin. Act III.—Mr. Unknown learns that this innocent country girl is heir to much wealth. He throws out his lines; he begins his campaign, heartless and cruel. Act IV.—The girl's sweetheart, the good, honest country boy, is on his way to see his fiancee; he is noticed by Mr. Unknown, who follows him; the evening is one of romantic moon-light. The boy reaches his destination. The girl invites him to a lonely, secluded corner of the yard. Mr. Unknown is concealed behind the shrubbery; he sees and hears everything that takes place between the two. His eyes gleam with fiendish cruelty, but he returns the weapon and disappears. Act V.—The boy returns at a late hour; the moon is hidden by clouds; his way is lonely and courses through a thick wood. Only the hoot of a solitary night

owl disturbs his peaceful mind. He hears a foot-step; he sees the glitter of a highly polished weapon—behold, the villain of the story appears! Just at this point, Mr. Whittleby, you appeared and brought me to broad daylight from that dark wood and glittering weapon."

"Truly an interesting romance, and well told," replied Ralph, "but I hope my coming was more pleasant than was that of Mr. Unknown, the villain."

"I think I said you brought me back to broad day-light from the dark wood; is that the part of a villain?" asked Marguerite.

"I thank you, Miss Mason, shall I infer—?"

"No, please, make no inferences at all," quickly interrupted Marguerite, "but will you not be seated and hear the continuation of this thrilling romance? That is a very comfortable rocker."

"I should be delighted to do so, I am sure, but I promised John Montcalm—would that promises could be made and broken at one's will and pleasure—that I would return immediately, and he is awaiting me. We shall look for you on Saturday evening; please, don't disappoint us. But I must be going, for I fear that

I have staid too long as it is. Of that story I hope to hear the end at some future time. Good-bye, Miss Mason."

"Good-bye, Mr. Whittleby," answered Marguerite. Their eyes met, the blue and the black; but only for an instant, and Ralph departed.

Saturday evening came, and with it all the invited guests. The day had been excessively warm; an early heat wave had struck this part of Maryland, and the more depressing, therefore, because it was both sudden and early. Mary entertained her company on the lawn, and the occasion was very enjoyable. John by his ease and perfect frankness had become well liked by the minister's family; even the Reverend Mr. Whittleby was almost forced to believe that the vague rumors of John and his beliefs were not well founded; but his beliefs were not as yet tested, so the minister decided to bide his time before arriving at conclusions. John himself was entirely ignorant thus far of any rumors that were afloat, and on this particular Saturday evening by his geniality and power of entertainment had become a central figure. The oppressive, stifling heat had depressed the rest of

the party, but John himself felt in better spirits than ever. He and Mary took especial pleasure in drawing Mother Whittleby into the evening's enjoyment, and the little woman for once seemed as young as her daughter. The minister was excusing himself, saying that he had work in the study.

"Mr. Whittleby," asked John, "cannot you defer your work and remain with us? It is hot in your study, and here on the lawn we shall try to make you forget the work and toil of your study."

"Thank you, Mr. Montcalm, but my place is in my study; I am getting too old for such occasions as this."

"On the contrary," replied John, "if you are really getting old, then you are getting too old for work in your study at this hour. Life is surely lengthened by such occasions as this; young company, healthy, life-giving sports under heaven's beautiful canopy, all this, Mr. Whittleby, is in strong contrast to your warm study and time-worn theology as your companion."

"Time-worn theology, Mr. Montcalm? But I must be going to my study. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen," and with that the minister

departed. John had touched, merely touched, a very delicate, tensely drawn chord of the Reverend Mr. Whittleby; the latter accepted the challenge. Plays began in earnest, and it was, indeed, a merry group; a ripple of laughter would occasionally reach the minister's ear, but he closed the windows, shutting out both the happy laughter of the company and the evening breeze, what little breeze there was.

"Gay, frivolous people! What gayety, what frivolity in our young folks these days, and in the very shadow of the church, too! Sacrilege, yes, almost blasphemy! 'Eat, drink, and be merry'—that is the motto, the maxim of life, the rule of action for our young people these days. And my wife, the wife of Reverend Mr. Whittleby, one of the group! What is this world coming to anyway? What would the good Deacon Smith say to this frivolity? Here I am working for the spreading of the Master's gospel by word and by writing, and there under my very nose, there under the protecting care of the mother church herself, there my wife and my children are courting the very devil himself. Frolicking on the lawn! Innocent sport, yes, it may be, but how few are the steps

and how short the way to dancing on the floors of the cheap dens of vice, portals closed to people of decency? And even now I hear that the dance has been introduced into the college circle. We shall next hear of the authorities legalizing, yea, licensing brothels. Then what shall become of the sacredness of the family circle? Where shall it all end? Where, where? Why not put one's foot on such frivolity as I now hear from my study window? Getting too old for work in my study at this hour! Join them in their worldly sports! God forbid! Time-worn theology—bah! Even now I hear Mary—"

"I beg your pardon, sir," interrupted a voice which belonged to John Montcalm; "I feel, indeed, that I am an unwelcome visitor, and I hope you will pardon this intrusion. I was requested by your good daughter Mary to bring you some of our refreshments, a token surely of her thoughtfulness for your comfort. Your door was open and I was forced to hear a part of your soliloquy; I assure you that I am sorry that I heard what I did, and I want you to know, Mr. Whittleby, that I was on the point of leaving when I heard you mention your

daughter's name. I did not want to hear you further, and therefore interrupted you by entering your study. I hope you did not think me irreverent of sacred things when I thoughtlessly remarked about your time-worn theology. About that I shall say nothing, but I feel it incumbent upon me to defend your family —no, please do not interrupt me, Mr. Whittleby," said John, now thoroughly aroused, "your family, especially your wife and daughter, than whom there can be found no nobler persons in this broad land of noble people, in their evening's innocent pleasure, a simple diversion from the daily routine of a monotonous village life. You may be right,—and even on this point there is room for discussion—when you say that the legalizing, the licensing of infamous dens would be a blow at the sacredness of our American fireside, but how dare you—"

"Enough, enough, Mr. Montcalm; are you not taught to respect the opinions of advancing age? Is not hair turned gray by experience, turned gray in fighting the world's battles, its immorality and vice, is—"

"Yes, Mr. Whittleby, I do respect and hold in reverence advancing age; but when I hear

you confuse the innocent pleasures, of which you yourself should partake, of your family and their guests, with the wickedness of the world, then, sir, I do protest. I repeat, sir, that that religion which confounds innocent family pleasures with empty gayety and frivolity is an empty religion. The salvation of our republic depends upon the stability of the family, and can you conceive of any better method for weakening this stability than by putting a ban on family pleasures? How dare you, I repeat, mention the dens of ill-fame and your family in the same breath? If the healthful ring of laughter in the shadow of the church, yes, in the church herself, be sacrilege, then let there be more sacrilege and less church. I hope you will not misunderstand me, sir; I revere holy things as much as anybody, and therefore I reverence the hearty peals of laughter that we even at this moment hear ringing from yonder lawn. I hope that your religion, sir—"

"Mr. Montcalm," quickly interrupted the minister, "will you please put an end to this interview at once? You may rejoin your pleasure seeking companions; as for me, my company can be anything but pleasant."

"As you will," replied John, "but I ask your pardon for any words of mine which possibly may have wounded, for they were entirely unintentional. And as a proof of my good will, Mr. Whittleby, I ask you again to join our little party on the lawn. Will you not do this for your family's sake, if not for your own? Surely the air on the lawn is not so stifling as it is here in your study. You will not? Then I hope you will enjoy these refreshments sent by your daughter. Good evening."

John rejoined the little group on the lawn, and was surprised to find the crowd around a new personage who, apparently, had just arrived, judging from his panting and blowing for breath; the stranger, thought John, evidently was not enjoying the oppressive heat; he was vigorously fanning himself.

"Mr. Montcalm," called out Mary Whittleby, "We were just wondering what had become of you. Why, what has happened to you? You look as if you had seen a ghost, or were you frightened by some of the church mice? Come, and meet Mr. Hezekiah Johnson, the village hack-driver, the village mail-carrier, and in every respect the beloved of the village folks,

adult and children alike. Mr. Johnson, can you give me enough of your time that I may present to you the guest of honor, Mr. John Montcalm?"

"I reckon I kin, Mary; sure I kin. The guest of honor? Now, that do be a nice thing to be called. But if Mr. Mont—Monti—well now, my memory be failin' fast, but I suppose plain out John will be good enough; ain't that so, Mr. John? But, as I was sayin', if John be the guest of honor, am I the 'onery guest? He, he, he! You see as how it was that I got to the party. Little Josie, as Mary tells me, was sent to the post-office for the mail this evening, and the youngster got tired waitin' for the mail box to open; well, Mr. Sandman—isn't that right, Josie?—gets a holt on Josie and he curls up unbeknowns to anybody in a soap box 'neath the counter and snoozes away comfortable like and unkerrin'. I walks into the store and I hears a noise and I says, says I, to the druggist, Got mice in the store? says I. And when I looks under the counter, there I seen little Josie. By this time it was dark, and little Josie was afraid to come home alone, so I fetches

him here, and now are Josie and me attendin' the party."

"I thought mother had put Josie to bed, and that is the reason I did not miss him. But we are glad to have Mr. Johnson in our crowd. Probably he could give us a story and tell us of some of his parties of long ago." Mary took a chair near old Johnson and sat down.

"Yes, I am gettin' old," replied old Dad, munching some cake that had been handed to him, "but I hopes never to be too old to enjoy the company of young folks. Did you ever see a little stream most dried up under the scorchin' heat of an August sun, so dry that the littlest tot could step acrost on the stones, becomin' drier every day? The medder along of the stream is becomin' parched, and the old cow is chewin' and breathin' hard under the trees along the creek. Everything, the little streams, the grass and the corn in the fields, everything is dyin' for the rain that is delayin' of its refreshing waters. Finally the little stream becomes almost dead, and then a little cloud, only as big as a hand, comes up in the distance; the little cloud grows larger and larger; the trees begin to sway in the breeze, and one drop,

then two drops, then a shower of restorin' rain! Talk about your 'lixirs of life, and the spring of always lastin' youth! I recerlect when I was in the primary department our teacher onct told us about that Mr. Ponce-man who was huntin' the 'lixir of life in the wood of Floridy. But I guess that man had no little tots like Josie climbin' around his knees, trampin' his corns and pullin' his whiskers; that, mebbe, hurts sometimes, but that's the 'lixir of life. That's the rain that freshens up the medders and the streams and gives new life to the dyin' corn. Where's the parson that he does not come out and drink his fill of this 'lixir of life, that is, not in Floridy, but in his own back yard? The 'lixir of life,—a family, young people, Josie, and parties sich as this!"

The old man was talking more to himself than to the crowd, but all those around old Dad listened attentively, nodding approval.

"Why, Mr. Johnson, you are quite a philosopher," began John, "and I suppose if we were to suggest a game of leap-frog, you would be the first one to join in, and you would leap the highest."

"I would try purty hard, I tell you. But I must be goin'; I just thought to bring Josie home, and I did'nt think to find a party here. Enjoy yourselves, and remember that old Dad is wishin' you well. Seein' this party of young spirits has started my old blood to run through these old bones and flesh like the rain fills up the streams and hurries it through the medders. But law me, get the parson out, get the parson out. Good night, and have a good time."

CHAPTER IV.

THE guests had departed, with the exception of Marguerite Mason, who had consented to spend the night with Mary and then attend the usual Sunday morning services. The Whittleby family had retired for the night, except Ralph and his sister. These two, with their guests, John and Miss Mason, were loitering on the front porch, almost loath to enter the heated rooms of the parsonage.

"It is too pleasant out of doors," said Ralph, "for us to go to bed; think of those hot rooms! Miss Mason, have you yet had the privilege of crossing the threshold that leads to my sanctum sanctorum under the old oak tree? Will you not join me in a short chat under the sacred branches of the old oak?

"I should be delighted to see this sacred place of yours," replied Miss Mason, impulsively, and not thinking of the lateness of the hour. The two left the porch. John remained silent; the moon had just disappeared under a cloud,

but before it disappeared Mary thought she detected a troubled look on John's usually cloudless face.

"Mr. Montcalm, will you not please tell me why you were absent for so long a time this evening when you took the refreshments to father?"

"O nothing particular; nothing particular," answered John.

"Are you honest when you say that?" asked Mary, feeling that John was keeping something from her.

"Well, Miss Whittleby, I suppose I may as well tell you just what did happen when I was in your father's study. I fear I have offended your father, in what way probably it is not necessary for me to say. The night is so calm, so peaceful, so beautiful indeed, excepting those few clouds which have just now hidden the moon, that I would not spoil its beauties by relating to you our conversation."

"I was afraid, Mr. Montcalm," said Mary, "that this thing would happen, for I suppose I am right when I imagine that you and father had your first dispute; I, however, did not think it would come so soon as this. But, please don't

feel hurt by anything father said; it is really too bad that I allowed you to carry the refreshments, for then the unpleasant affair would not have happened."

"If it would not have occured then, it surely would have occurred at some future time," replied John; "I find that your father and I do not coincide in our views to any great extent," he continued.

"Well, let us hope that nothing like it shall occur again, Mr. Montcalm. Father has not been in very good health of late, and is consequently somewhat irritable. I suppose the best method to pursue for peace would be for both to remain silent or to agree."

"Ah, Miss Whittleby, you do not know me, I fear. Is it right to remain silent when the health of a man and the happiness of his family are at stake? You surely can see,—but pardon me, it is too late for any lengthy discussion."

"Yes, you are right, it is too late, but I hope to hear of this again; I now hear Ralph and Marguerite walking up the path." Mary went into the house to get the lamp preparatory to going to their rooms, leaving John seated on the porch alone.

"It is my desire, nay, my command, Mr. Whittleby, that you forget the conversation which has just taken place, both for your sake and for mine. Had I known the object of your invitation for a short chat, I surely would not—"

John was for the second time in one evening an unwilling auditor of words that were not intended for his ears, and he gave a little cough that the two walking up the path might be aware of his presence on the porch. The conversation of Ralph and Marguerite was thus interrupted, and silently or casually remarking about the increasing oppressiveness of the heat, they reached the porch.

The clouds were rapidly gathering; the stifling heat was relieved only by an occasional light breeze. For some time an occasional low rumble of thunder had been heard. As the two approached the porch, the darkness was that of pitch, but a flash of lightning revealed to John their two outlines, with the intense blackness as a portentous background; another flash, and he thought he saw a flush, a deep flush on Marguerite's beautiful face. Not having forgotten his own experience with the minister, and

thinking that that was sufficient for one evening, he was much relieved to have his thoughts turned into a new channel by the return of Mary.

"It is so very dark that I cannot see anyone, but I suppose it is not too dark for all of you to find your way to the dining room, where we shall have a little iced lemonade, which I know shall be refreshing before going up to our hot rooms."

"Just like you, Miss Whittleby, always thinking of the comfort of others. I believe as we are soon to be refreshed with lemonade from your kind hands, so shall a dry, parched earth be soon refreshed by a much needed rain from other beneficent hands."

The four gathered in the dining room, and all drank heartily, except Marguerite, who refused the glass handed to her.

"What, don't you care for a drink?" asked Mary; "why, Marguerite, your lips look parched, your face so warm that you really must drink a little to cool you off."

To avoid further discussion, Marguerite sipped a little of the lemonade, and then remarked about the heat.

"If any of the family upstairs should be awake," said Ralph, "I suppose they are wondering what is detaining us. Father, you know, is always more nervous than usual on Saturday night, and I fear we may be keeping him awake, so, John, I presume we must bid the ladies 'good night' and go to our room."

It was not long until the parsonage was quiet. It was now after midnight, and the village was wrapped in a blanket of intense darkness. John, who was occupying the room with Ralph, was finding it difficult to get to sleep; always a light sleeper and a dreamer, the events of the evening just passed did not tend to produce sleep, at least not without effort. From his bed he could see through the open window in his room, but in that direction there was nothing but intense, painful darkness; an occasional flash of lightning would reveal the somber outlines of the church, which was in the same yard as the parsonage. One flash, he saw the church; another flash, he saw the church with its tall spire reaching almost up to the clouds, he thought; still another flash, and he saw the church with its tall spire, and the small gilded cross which capped the spire; a fourth

flash, brighter and more blinding, and he saw only the cross. A loud peal of thunder followed the last lightning flash, and John closed his eyes, turning his face from the window. The evening's events—his meeting with the minister; the reproval of Ralph by Marguerite; the tall, somber form of the church standing like a sentinel over the village; the cross in the clouds, and then—Mary; all these things passed through his thoughts in rapid succession. He began to doze, and then to dream; he stood on the rocky shore of the ocean; the night was wild, and the dashing waves threatened to sweep both him and the rocky shore out into the deep. All alone he stood there on the wild shore, with no sound but the dashing of the waves, and the wild screams of the sea-gull; all was dark out on the ocean deep; he now hears a mournful cry; was it only the cry of a bird of the sea or was it a human voice? He shuddered to think of any human mortal out there battling against the waves. He now raises his hand to his eyes, and looks sharply and intently at one spot where the waves are rolling and beating with desperate fury. What is it? O, God, it surely can't be!—yes, a gilded cross raised on the crest

of a mighty wave, and the form of a young girl beaten and dashed by the angry waves! She is now appealing to the cross for help; the cross, bright and dazzling, stands mute and helpless. From his position on the wave-beaten shore he looks again and sees in the form of the young girl the features of Mary. He sees the great gulf fixed between himself and the helpless girl dashed about by the waves as though she were a helpless toy, a plaything. The cross, can she reach it, can she reach it? He in his desperation sends a prayer to heaven. The cross, the cross, will it help her, will it save her? The struggle goes on; she appeals again to the cross, and lifts her arms to grasp it, but in vain. The cross, ever bright and dazzling, stands mute and motionless, rigid there on the crest of the wave. On the rocky shore John becomes demon-like when he sees the struggling girl helplessly and in vain appealing to the cross for safety; he now feels there can be no hope in the cross; if the girl is to be saved, he must do it, and with this determination he hurls himself upon a white-crested wave and with dragon-like power he begins to conquer the waves. He is now fighting the very elements of nature, but little

by little, inch by inch, he gains; disputing the mastery of the sea he fights his way, the waves boiling with rage that they cannot hurl him back to the rocky coast; but he is gradually gaining, leaping, almost leaping from one wave to another; he can now almost reach the struggling form of the girl; one more attempt and he feels that the victory shall be his. He sees the shining beauty of the cross fade, and the girl turning from the cross is now appealing to him, mortal man. One more space and he can touch her; he feels victory already within his grasp, and then,—a terrific peal of thunder and the crashing of a fallen tree awakened John from his dreaming sleep; he awoke with a sudden jump, covered with cold perspiration. His head was turned to the window, and in the now almost incessant flashes of lightning he clearly saw the cross standing in bold relief on the church spire, standing as though master of the storm itself, as though mocking John on his sleepless bed. Where was Mary?—he thought, she who but a short time ago was vainly appealing to that same cross for help. Ah, that was a dream, and John breathed a heavy sigh of relief; he could even yet hear the roar of the

ocean now intermingled with the deep rolling and growling of the thunder; he could even yet see the cross haughtily placed on the ocean's crest, the same cross that was now on the stately, cloud-touching spire. The storm for a few moments seemed to abate, but it was only for a few moments, for it soon broke out in fresh fury; another peal of thunder seemed to shake the house loose from its foundation. The lightning played around the church spire with sublime grandeur; to John it seemed that the lightning flashes originated from the cross itself, the cross standing there with its strange, peculiar brightness. The rain was falling in torrents, and the wind was blowing a veritable gale; the crashing of the fallen limbs of trees could be plainly heard above the roaring, howling wind. Could the beloved old oak tree withstand the onslaughts of the storm?—this question John asked himself. If it could not, and the fury of the storm was even then increasing, would not its falling, the whole tree, or even branches of it, endanger life and property? Then he thought of the possible danger of the two girls who occupied the room nearest to the big tree. Smaller trees were falling under the lash of the

storm; was the oak stronger than the storm? Thoughts such as these flashed through his mind even as the lightning was flashing around the church and its spire. John was now thoroughly alive to the situation; blinding flashes of light, followed by deafening peals of thunder, failed to arouse his companion calmly sleeping beside him; John was almost provoked at the depth of his sleep.

John again looked at the cross on the church spire. Another bright, blinding flash, more intense than he had ever seen,—and John saw the cross belch forth from its center a red angry ball of fire; a peal of thunder that deafened him for a moment, and that shook the earth, it seemed, followed the fire-bolt from the cross.

"My God," cried John, jumping from his bed and hastening to the window, "the tower is falling, will it strike the house?" He did not need wait for an answer; the church tower had indeed fallen, and it fell with a crash that awakened the whole village.

The two boys were soon in their clothes, Ralph shuddering with fear as he was thus suddenly awakened from a deep sleep. As John

was dressing he thought how nearly the cross came to striking his window as it fell to the ground; he remembered how near in his dream he was to the cross on the crest of the ocean wave as it began to fade in its brightness. At that time he was awakened from his sleep by a peal of thunder, and now he was brought to himself again by the excitement in the house and in the village.

The occupants of the parsonage had gathered in the sitting room, the room on the side of the house looking towards the church; all were scantily clad. None had as yet thought of lighting the lamp, for no lamp was necessary, as the lightning flashes kept the room sufficiently well lighted. The girls had not taken time to attend to their persons, and appeared in the room with their hair in long plaits thrown over their shoulders. Josie was brought into the room by his mother, the little fellow trembling from fright. Ralph's eyes were turned unconsciously towards Marguerite; a queen could not have looked more majestic than Marguerite. In one of the lightning's flashes she saw Ralph looking in her direction, and, becoming conscious of her scantily clothed body, she flushed,

and then shuddered. The minister had just entered the room.

"An angry God is visiting punishment upon a sinning people," he said, looking towards John as he spoke. No stronger impulse was necessary than that caused by just those few words of the minister to bring John to complete control of himself.

"Is no one going to look after the church?" asked John. "It has been struck by lightning, and one of the natural consequences of a stroke of lightning is fire," and saying this he seized the key to the church door, which was left hanging usually on the wall of the parsonage, near the door, and ran out into the rain. Mary threw a rain-coat over her shoulders and followed him, but John was already in the church; a score of excited village people was following him. There was a smell of smoke, but if fire had followed the lightning stroke, it had already been extinguished by the torrents of rain that had fallen. Meanwhile the crowd was increasing. The storm was now rapidly passing, and the rain had almost ceased; it was not long before the clouds began to break and the moon soon began to peep from behind the clouds.

With the distant roll of thunder, occasional flashes of light, only the water dripping from the swaying trees, it became apparent that the work of destruction was over. Nearly all Hilldale had gathered around the church, and many comments were made upon the fallen tower.

"The cross, the precious cross," cried out the minister, almost crazed with excitement, "where is the cross? Will you all cruelly, wickedly trample it under foot? Why do you all stand like dumb brutes? Who will find the cross and restore it to safety?"

John had seen the cross pass the window of his room during its fall, and hence knew where to look for it. He picked it up, in two pieces, and taking it thus shattered to the minister, he handed it to him. The sight of John brought to the mind of the minister their conversation in the study only a few hours previously. At that time his words were guarded and guided by a calm mind; now as he was the victim of excitement, his words came forth like wild, unbridled horses.

"You, you, Mr. Montcalm, do you thus defile the cross, this precious, sacred cross? Has not an indignant God shown His righteous

anger because of your words of blasphemy in His holy church last evening? And now do you defile the cross with your touch? More sacrilege and less church!" hoarsely cried out the minister, pointing to the fallen tower. "Begone, begone, sir, with your words of blasphemy."

"Father, father, what do you mean? Father," continued Mary as she ran up to the two men, "do you know what you are saying? What is the matter, Mr. Montcalm?"

Mr. Whittleby was standing with an attitude as though he intended to strike John with the short bar of the cross. Mary caught her father's arm, and tried to pull him back.

"Miss Whittleby, Mary, may I escort you to the house?" John was calm as he spoke; "this is no place for you; please come with me."

The village people had now gathered around the minister as he stood there, holding the fragments of the broken cross. He noticed among the crowd the faces of many of his church members. He looked at the broken cross, then at the people. He looked as though he wished to speak to the people, and they became silent.

"Friends, my friends, we behold yonder the work of an angry God, a God who will not let sin go unpunished. And yet an angry God can show mercy; He has preserved the church from total destruction, and for that we owe thanks. The tower has fallen, the cross broken, but the church still stands, and in the morning we shall have our usual Sunday services. Let us all now go to our homes."

By this time Mary and John had reached the house.

"Mr. Montcalm, you and Ralph please go to your rooms at once, before father returns to the house. Father, I know, is much disturbed for some reason; he attributes the destruction of the church tower to an angry God for acts of wickedness, probably your very words in the study last evening, while you yourself would not agree with him. Neither one would convince the other, so please retire before father returns to the house."

The different members of the household had gone to their rooms when the minister reached the house, and it was not long until the parsonage again became quiet.

CHAPTER V.

NEVER in the history of Hilldale did the village folks awaken to a more beautiful morning than that after the storm; the sun shone brightly, the air was cool and crisp. The chirping of birds as they fluttered from tree to tree told of happiness that can exist only in birds. The bright shining of the sun turned the rain drops on the leaves of the trees to brilliant diamonds. A beautiful Sunday morning! But as the sun shone on an earth that sang of joy, an earth refreshed by the rain, it also shone on a scene of destruction the like of which had never been known in the village. The memory of the oldest inhabitant was appealed to, but it was appealed to in vain, for there was no recollection, no memory of a more destructive storm.

The wind had torn many of the trees out with their roots, and then had hurled them over great distances. The main street of the village was strewn with large branches of broken limbs of trees. Chimneys were blown over, and at

many places bricks were scattered with the broken branches. Carriages in the stable yards were overturned. The damage to fruit was enormous; many a family of the village and the surrounding country lamented the total destruction of a favorite pippin-tree or of a tree that had been loved by generations for its shade,—for years a constant companion, a sacred member of the family, now destroyed by the storm of the previous night! But in all the work of destruction the staunch old oak tree stood unscarred, unhurt; on this beautiful Sunday morning it stood there in the parsonage yard as the king of the tree kingdom. Its highest branches sparkled diamond-like in the sun, waving words of encouragement to other trees not so fortunate as itself. It told of storms in the past and renewed its promises for the future, that it would continue the leader, the king of trees.

The minister arose early, and not wishing any breakfast, he went over to his study to finish the sermon which he had intended to preach at the morning service. He sat down at his desk and turned the sermon over in his hands; from his window he could see the fallen tower, scattered in broken pieces around the church

yard. Though early, many village people were viewing the fallen tower; some picked up pieces of the tower and carried them away with them, as though wishing to keep fresh in memory the work of one night of destruction. The minister again took up his sermon, looked at it, then placed it on the table.

"No, I will not do it; a sermon of Thanksgiving? Thanksgiving for what? Thankful that the mighty God in righteous indignation should hurl to destruction yonder church spire? Did not the Master drive the money-changers from the temple with the lash of His whip, and with stinging, biting rebuke? Why, then, should we compromise with evil at this time? Why not begin with the young people of the church and interpret to them in this morning's sermon the voice of God which rode on last night's storm? And if there is any disturbing leaven, then why not drive it from our midst as the Master drove the devils out into the sea? Why not point out to my people the lesson which last night's storm surely teaches?" The minister was again becoming exited as he continued, "An evening of frivolous pleasures, encouraged even by my wife, of gayety even in

the shadow of the fallen spire; insulting words here in the study, words of insult from an unthinking, unbelieving student, whose very presence in the church should not be allowed. It is said that he is a skeptic; but I need not rumors for proof, for I have heard enough. Oh, perverse generation, how long, how long! A sermon then of condemnation of our rapidly growing tendency from all things that are pure, sacred and holy, to the light, the frivolous, and the gay; that is the plain lesson of the storm."

But the minister was not at ease; he walked to and fro in his study. He appeared nervous, showing plainly the effects of a sleepless night; his face wore a haggard look, and sitting down at his desk he reached for his Bible to read the lesson appointed for the day.

He read, "And after these things He went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But the scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?"

And Jesus answering said,—"They that are whole need not a physician; I came not to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance."

"The lesson for the day! Is that a lesson consistent with a sermon of condemnation? 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance!' Can we call sinners to repentance by condemning them? The Master ate and drank with sinners, and then converted them; won their confidence first, then conversion followed."

Such was the minister's meditation as he took up his sermon on condemnation and slowly placed it in his desk. Then he thought of himself after the storm, filled with anger as he stood with the shattered cross in his hands ready to strike John Montcalm. John, he remembered, was calm, his face and action spoke of peace; he saw him,—nay, first he heard him call his daughter by her given name, Mary, and then he saw him lead her away from himself to the parsonage. What did it mean? The scene just recalled grew more vivid as the minister sat in his study. Ralph, he felt, was safe from all hurtful, unorthodox influence; he remembered that as a boy he would repeat his father's creed, and would promise to fight for it. Ralph, he

felt, was staunch in the faith. But how was it with Mary? A new thought was born to the minister, and without hesitation his course of action as far as John Montcalm was concerned was settled. There was only one thing for him to do, and he proceeded to do it at once.

Without further considering his sermon prepared on condemnation, and remembering the lesson of the Master feasting with the publicans, he quickly left his study and walked over to the house. The family had just left the breakfast table. Marguerite Mason had expressed a wish to walk to her home, saying that she was not feeling good, but Mary persuaded her to remain and take breakfast. The breakfast was a short one, and Mary and Marguerite left the table and walked to the yard.

"Mary," asked her father, walking up to the two girls, "where is Mr. Montcalm? I would like to speak with him." Mary thought she saw in her father's face a look of peace and calmness that seemed strange, and yet a look also of determination.

"I will look for him, father," she replied, "and shall send him to you. Shall he meet you in the study, father?"

"No, Mary," replied the minister, "at the fallen church tower."

As John walked towards the fallen spire, he wondered what the minister had to say to him. During the week preceding the Saturday evening's party on the lawn, John in his conversation with the minister felt a certain friction which he could only explain by their differences of opinion. John had allowed for an honest difference of opinion in others, and he claimed the same privilege for himself; he had never as yet come into open conflict with those who honestly opposed his views. He could therefore not understand why this friction existed between the minister and himself. John, in his views, was happy and contented, satisfied; the minister had seemed to him continually fearful of antagonism. What could he say to John at this time? And he was requested to meet him at the fallen church tower, so Mary had told him. John walked up to the fallen spire and bade the minister a good morning.

"Mr. Montcalm, I should be ashamed to meet you this morning," began the minister without the least hesitation, "and to be candid

and frank with you, I am ashamed to look you in the face after my disgraceful—"

"Oh, Mr. Whittleby," interrupted John, "please make no mention of last night; we can both forget it."

"No," continued the minister, "hear me. My actions and words to you on this very spot last evening were nothing less than disgraceful, and I ask your pardon. The irritation resulting from our meeting last evening was increased by the excitement of the storm, and my actions were the result. I ask your pardon, and I hope the remainder of your visit to our village will be free from any similar occasion. We hope to have you meet with us in church this morning, and for that it is almost time; I must, therefore, go and finish my preparations."

John could hardly believe the words of the minister. Whence the change in the minister's attitude towards himself? There was no doubt that the minister's conduct was disgraceful, to say the least, but why should he acknowledge it, and so quickly too? He at once sought Mary, and the two took a walk down the village street.

"What a grand morning!" began Mary, "surrounded thus by the beauties of nature one

can almost forget the terrible storm. What a pity that those beautiful trees should have been mutilated in this way! What time is it, Mr. Montcalm?"

John showed her his watch, and finding that there was a full half hour until church time, Mary asked John if he cared to take a walk through the village.

"Would like nothing better; at this present moment, Miss Whittleby, I feel as happy as that red-breasted robin on yonder silver-maple, and with yourself as a companion,—well, I am sure that I would prefer that we had four hours before church-time, and that our walk extend all over Maryland. 'Maryland, My Maryland',"—John began to sing with a clear, rich voice.

"Why, Mr. Montcalm, you are certainly beyond all comprehension; last night's storm, your unhappy meeting with father, evidences of the storm all around us,—with all this you are here singing as light-hearted as that oriole; listen to its mellow whistle, how like a flute? Isn't it beautiful? But sing on."

"Why such cheerfulness, you ask? The storm is over, there is some damage, it is true,

but not irreparable. And then this unspeakably beautiful morning! Who would not feel light-hearted? And then to have a companion as fair as the morning itself—why, Miss Whittleby, do you envy me my happiness? 'Maryland, My Maryland.'"

After a short walk the two reached the northern end of the village, and there they had a broad view of the surrounding country. The town was peculiarly situated. Old Johnson, the hack-driver, described the village as being on a hill and in a hollow. "You see," he would say, "when you come into Hilldale from the north or south you must use a little persuasion on your horses, and if the load is heavy you must even get out and walk. But if you come in either the east or west roads, you must put on your brakes, and you must put them on tight, too." The hack-driver's description was correct, and as Mary and John now reached the northern end of the village, a panorama of sublime beauty was there spread out before them.

"How like life itself is the scene that is here presented before your eyes, Miss Whittleby," began John; "with careful scrutiny and exact detail we can here and there pick out some of

HERE THEY HAD A BROAD VIEW OF THE SURROUNDING COUNTRY.

the black spots of last night's storm. Look at that orchard, hardly a tree has escaped; there, to your left, you see a barn that was partly unroofed; thus, if you look closely you can pick out such black spots. But overlook those little details and look at the whole scene: how exquisitely beautiful! It pains our eyes to pick out and examine the details of the scene before us, such details as yonder unroofed barn in the distance; but how restful to our eyes is the green landscape of nature blending there at the horizon with the pale blue of the sky! So we may also look back upon our lives, and pick out dark, black pages, pages that give us pain in recording. But the life itself of man, how beautiful, as beautiful as this grand Sunday morning."

"First with a light heart you sing of Maryland, our little state which we all love so thoroughly, and then showing the more serious yet always hopeful aspect of your nature you philosophize with the optimism of a Leibnitz. What a strange being you are, Mr. Montcalm!" laughingly exclaimed Mary, looking, however, as though she had more to say.

"Probably I am one of the blemishes on the beautiful face of a beautiful earth, just as last

night your father,—oh no, pardon me, Miss Whittleby; only a little while ago I told your father that we both could forget last night, and, as you said only a short time ago, when thus surrounded by the beauties of nature we can easily forget her storms."

At first mention of her father's name, John noticed a slight cloud gather on Mary's face, and at once he attempted to turn her thoughts into a different channel. But Mary was not to be bribed so easily.

"You mentioned father and last night, Mr. Montcalm, and impelled by all the curiosity of a woman, I ask you why it was that father wanted you this morning, if you can pardon my boldness in asking. I ask you, of course, believing that your meeting had reference to the affair of last night."

"Yes, you are right, Miss Whittleby, and I for one cannot understand the position your father has assumed with respect to me; his words seemed to indicate that he was very sorry for his hasty words of last night. To be honest, I was expecting a very polite invitation to end my vacation, just when it is becoming very interesting. But your father has apologized for

his hasty action, and has given me his good wishes for the remainder of my vacation. What does it mean? I really must confess that I was not a little pleased with our meeting this morning; of course you understand that I do not rejoice in having been able to draw an apology from your father; but I felt that I was wronged before the people of the village last night, and therefore that his course this morning was the only just one. He even invited me to be present at the church services this morning."

"Are you going?" inquired Mary.

"Certainly; why should I not go?"

"Besides being a light-hearted singer and philosopher of the optimistic school, you also have the forgiving spirit of one of the saints."

"I thank you for your flattering comment, Miss Whittleby, which I do not deserve; but why should I walk around with a long face this morning, and why should I show an unforgiving spirit? I have not been harmed; my reputation with the village people has not, I believe, been damaged. And then, again, we must not forget our surroundings,—the diamonds sparkling on the trees, thirsted nature refreshed by a much-needed rain, and at the same time, when

we think of the storm, we must not forget that some of those trees needed trimming and pruning anyway."

"Well, well, that surely is an original way to consider the storm. God sends the storm to prune our trees?" asked Mary.

"Why, certainly," answered John; is it not more natural to think that God, a God who loves the fruits of His own creation, sends a storm to prune trees than to think that He as an angry God, raging in His temper at the sinful deeds of man, sends a storm to strike down innocent trees? Would a just God send a bolt of lightning to strike a newly built barn, destroying the fruits of a season, which His own rain, His own sun, His own nature, He Himself brought to perfection, destroying the lives of innocent and sinless cattle, and all because the owner of the barn, the crops, the cattle, is a sinner? Is that your conception of a just, a loving God? No, Miss Whittleby, we dare not think of God as a being looking for revenge."

"Probably you are right, but why should a just God visit destruction on a church which is supposed to be His own temple?" asked Mary.

"Miss Whittleby," answered John, "it is simply a question of physics, and God is the Creator of physical laws, as He is of humanity and its laws. The atmosphere becomes overcharged with electricity, a force of God's own creation. At times we may have a discharge of this overcharged atmospheric electricity between two clouds which act as opposite poles, or electrodes, and we then have the ordinary flash of lightning, which, as you know, is often sublime in its beauty. Again, the poles may be a cloud and a church tower, the latter, because of its point and by its reaching above the surrounding objects, furnishing a very excellent pole, indeed; and in the natural sequences of an electrical storm there may be a discharge between these two poles, a cloud and the church tower. Now, I ask you, Miss Whittleby, in all sincerity, did God ordain that any one part of His temples, the churches, here on earth should be so constructed that their towers should furnish such admirable electrodes? No, that is man's creation, and if the officers of a church are ignorant of God's laws, if they are unacquainted with and will not obey His laws of electricity, and will not supply protection for such a tower, then it is true that

those church officials are punished; they, however, are not punished for any innocent sports or for any opinions which may stand as heresy even, but for ignorance and disobedience of God's laws. That is the lesson that I would draw from last night's storm; that is the lesson that I would teach the members who shall attend church this morning, had I the chance, and that is the lesson that I would impress upon all those connected with the building of lofty church spires. In other words, I suppose I might say that I would be a good lightning-rod agent."

"After that little sermon, which I must say was very interesting, I suppose we need not go to the church this morning. However, Mr. Montcalm, I feel pretty certain that father will choose a different text and draw different conclusions in his sermon. But to the qualities of singer and philosopher, I must now add two more, those of scientist and theologian."

"Why not combine the latter two, Miss Whittleby, and say scientific theologian?" asked John, smiling. But deep down in his heart, John, though intensely interested and in earnest in what he had just said, was already beginning

to wish that there could be added still another element, or name, or whatever it might be called, which Mary had not yet discerned.

The two turned towards the church, for it was now time for services to begin. Indeed, both of them had for the time being forgotten that there was such a thing as time, and when they reached the church, the services had already begun. The church was crowded. The regular church goers were almost crowded out of their usual pews by the crowd drawn to church that morning by idle curiosity. What would the minister have to say in his sermon? As Mary and John walked to their seats, eyes turned and tongues wagged. What was said by those who were more interested in John and Mary than in the services of worship need not be written; many were in the congregation who had heard the minister's words the previous night, and who saw John lead Mary away from her angry father, and hence many looked first towards the minister and then to John. At the first appearance of the two, the minister showed a slight flush and accidentally omitted several words in the Scripture reading. The flush lasted only for an instant, but all saw it,

for all expected it. The omission of a few words in the reading of the Scriptures caused what might have been ordinarily a very perceptible break in the grammatical construction, but none noticed it. With the exception of this slight interruption, the services proceeded undisturbed.

The minister, with a worn, yet strangely peaceful look, began his sermon. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." In his sermon the minister referred to the destruction of the church tower during the night; the loss was great, he said, but God was merciful in that He had saved the church. God is a just God; there are unmistakable evidences of wrongdoing in the village, and being a just God, He is compelled to send such punishments as destructive storms. But God is also a God of mercy; in His mercy he saved the church from total destruction; he allowed the spire to fall as a warning to sinners. He wished his hearers to feel that his words to them were not those of condemnation, but words of warning. There were undoubtedly those among the congregation who were even now hesitating between a choice of the right and the wrong; their very hesitancy was a proof that not only they themselves were

on dangerous ground, but that they were influencing others for evil. They were in need of such warnings as God clearly gave in the storm. In all sincerity he was now grateful to God for His mercy, but he was also admonishing the sinners who were listening to him to examine themselves, their beliefs, their actions. Such was the lesson to be derived from the storm. He "called sinners to repentance." The minister in his sermon made no personal references either by word or look; the congregation was, therefore, disappointed, and after the people were dismissed the tongues of the town gossips again began to wag, and at many a dinner table on that Sunday the names of John Montcalm and Mary Whittleby were mentioned with the same breath.

CHAPTER VI.

THE charge which the Reverend Mr. Whittleby served was composed of three churches, one in Hilldale and two in the country. The latter churches, one to the east and the other to the south of the village, he served on alternate Sundays. One sermon as a rule served for both of the country churches, and to this extent alone would the minister lessen his usually heavy work. His country congregations were composed of a simple-minded country people, who did not always appreciate a doctrinal sermon which the minister quite frequently gave them. If the truth were told, the minister's country churches were not especially flourishing. Pastoral work was more necessary among these people than learned discourses; they got more of the latter than of the former, and consequently the number of church-goers began to decrease, gradually but surely.

Another week had passed, and it was Sunday again, another day when the summer's sun was

glowing. It was a day when a drive in the country must be enjoyed by every one, even by those least responsive to nature's gifts. Ralph had accompanied his father to one of his churches. Service that afternoon was very sparsely attended. June was nearing its end, and the Maryland sky was overhung with fleecy clouds. The farmers had gathered for family dinners. They were too busy, therefore, to attend the afternoon services of the church. All through the country the farmers were in groups, talking about the storm, or making conjectures over the coming harvest; groups everywhere, except in church.

The faithful few, those who can be found in their accustomed pews, no matter the kind of weather or who the preacher, or the kind of sermon preached, those only were assembled on this particular Sunday afternoon. As the minister and his carriage approached, the little bell was rung, and the few men who had gathered about the church door took their seats. The sexton continued to pull the bell rope until the minister entered the church. It was a lazy afternoon; the windows were thrown open, and the soothing effect of the warm, light breeze

that blew over the heads of the few assembled, combined with the buzzing, the montonous buzzing of the bees and the sleepy singing of the locusts, did not present to the minister a very enthusiastic or inspiring congregation; the high-back benches and the church choir—well meaning, and yet a country church choir where he and she are the best singers who can outsing, in intensity, the rest of the choir members—were probably more potent factors in keeping the congregation awake than the minister's sermon itself. It was surely not a very encouraging sight for one whose mission it was to save souls; but the minister preached on. Probably all were relieved when the last word was spoken, and the congregation finally dismissed.

Ralph and his father were again in their carriage on their homeward journey. Faithful old Dolly, well acquainted with this particular road, was as lazy as the congregation; the conversation between father and son was at first not very brisk. Ralph from boyhood was very bold in defending his father's opinions, especially when his father was not around to hear him, but from boyhood he also regarded his father with a degree of reverence that approached fear

and awe. To say the least, he was strangely uncomfortable in his father's presence, and unusually so on this Sunday afternoon with his father in the carriage beside him.

"Ralph," began his father, "what does your friend, John Montcalm, propose to make of himself?"

"I don't know, and I don't think he knows himself; he very often makes a fool of himself."

This was the first time Ralph had spoken depreciatingly of John to anyone, and as he said it a sneer crawled over his face. Ralph was confident that John heard the words of reproval from Miss Mason the night of the storm. His father expressed words of surprise upon hearing such a sentiment from his son, although the minister had noticed a change in Ralph during the short time that he was at home, or at least he imagined that he had. Generally quiet and reserved when in his presence, the minister thought he now noticed a tinge of moroseness in his son.

"Why, Ralph, my son, what do you mean by that?"

"Well," answered Ralph, "it seems that every time he gets a chance to propound any of

his fandangle theories, he takes much delight in doing it. From me he gets no encouragement, and never did. At college it was my pleasure to leave the room as soon as he would start on one of his pets."

"I must say, Ralph, that before you and he came from college, I was much prejudiced against him by rumors that were afloat in the village. But since he has been here he has become such a general favorite among the village people that I suppose even those who helped to spread the rumors would not countenance them any longer. As for myself, I suppose you know all that occurred the day and night of the storm; since then I find that as far as I am concerned he must be approached first on almost any subject before he gives an opinion. But no doubt you know better. What are some of his pet theories, Ralph?"

"Oh, anything with an ism attached to it; in religious matters, I suppose you might place him in a class by himself and call it Montcalmism."

"Suppose, then," said his father, becoming much interested, "you define Montcalmism."

"I have never held any lengthy conversation with him," replied Ralph, "upon this particular subject, for I could not, and would not tolerate anything he might say, and not willing to lose his friendship, for you know the status of the Montcalm family, I always found it convenient to leave the room. But, as far as I can understand, he is wrong in his conceptions of some of the very essentials of our creed."

"What, for instance?" asked his father.

"Father, I would rather not speak more about it, for I do not want you to change your growing respect for him."

Mr. Whittleby caught a very slight tone of sarcasm in his son's last remark, and to his surprise was added not a little wonder. But he said nothing, and Ralph continued.

"He says he believes in the creed, the so-called Apostles' Creed, but then he quickly adds that he believes in it with his own interpretation. Christ to him was a good man, yes, I think he says a perfect man, and in His perfectness consisted His divinity, and in that alone. In all other respects Christ was a man, born as a babe, grown to manhood. And thus he goes around finding, as he says, 'little Christs, bun-

dles of divinity, in the modern mangers, the slums of our great cities.' "

"H'm," muttered the minister, "then rumor is correct after all. But go on."

"Well, father, you can easily see where such a doctrine would lead our church. But I prefer that for further information you interview John himself. As for myself, I shall say nothing further. I think, as you say, that John has become a general favorite in the village. They say that old Dad Johnson is never so happy as when he has John to accompany him on his trips to and from the station, and I suppose John finds entertainment in the old hack-driver."

"What, enjoy the company of that old reprobate, a man who never sees the inside of a church! Probably he is another bundle of divinity!"

"And father," Ralph continued, "from my own observations I think that Mary is unusually happy the last few weeks."

Ralph had touched a sympathetic chord in his father, and though there was no verbal response, yet inwardly the minister, somewhat vexed as he already was by the small, sleepy

congregation of the afternoon, experienced almost the same feeling towards John as he did the night of the storm. But he said nothing; he merely struck Dolly a blow, which for its unusual severity surprised both himself and Dolly. He again made another resolution; he would make it convenient to have a talk with John; he would thus learn from John himself what opinions he held; he would then determine whether he was entertaining a wolf in sheep's clothing. At Ralph's strange attitude towards John the minister was much surprised. Were they not friends when they came to the village from college? If they were, and the minister believed they were, were they not friends at present? Ralph's conversation seemed to indicate that they were not; if not, then why not? Could the reason be that Ralph could not tolerate John's position on various questions of church and state? If that was not the reason, and if there was another, what was it? And then Ralph mentioned Mary! The minister resolved to wait and make his own observations; he would have a conversation with John, and then he would draw his own conclusions.

The two in the carriage reached home a short time before the Sunday evening tea, and after stabling Dolly, the minister and Ralph walked through the yard. They found seated under the oak tree Mary, Marguerite Mason and John. As yet the three under the oak tree had not noticed Ralph and his father approaching, and were laughing and chatting as so many magpies. Marguerite seemed to be the center of the group; she was the chief entertainer. Ralph flushed and the scar above his eye changed to a scarlet red as he approached the tree. As though she felt some one approaching, Marguerite turned and saw first the scar and then Ralph. But with the arrival of Ralph and his father, she forgot the scar, forgot the sudden sense of rebellion which had arisen at sight of the scar, and saw only his handsome form, his broad shoulders, his black hair and piercing eyes.

"I suppose," began Mary, "that you had a full church this afternoon, father, did you not?"

"On the contrary," replied Mr. Whittleby, "there were fewer members than ordinarily; weather exceedingly bad and weather exceedingly good, both are death to church attendance.

I suppose there were many groups under oak trees instead of being in church."

"Mr. Whittleby, do you think that is quite fair to the present group under this oak tree?" laughingly inquired John Montcalm.

Marguerite wished to say something and looked up, but she again saw the red scar which, however, was now gradually fading to its usual color; she therefore remained quiet. In a moment she again raised her eyes in Ralph's direction, and this time their eyes met; the scar had faded, and Marguerite saw only Ralph; his eyes pierced to the very depths of her soul, and held her transfixed, as it were. But it was only for the moment, and Marguerite regaining control of herself joined in the conversation.

The conversation between the various personages under the oak tree was on commonplace topics alone. Mary soon left the group to help her mother with the evening lunch, and it was not long before they were all gathered around the table. Marguerite was a guest for the evening lunch, promising to accompany Mary to the evening church service. Fickle, frail human nature! What did Marguerite Mason care about the evening church service?

She could only see, yes, feel herself held by the piercing magnetism of a pair of black eyes. John would surely seek Mary's company after church, and would not Ralph see that she got home safely? That was included in her promise to accompany Mary to church.

And Marguerite was correct. The evening service was long and tedious, she thought; but it finally came to an end, and after the walk to the parsonage and a little conversation there, Marguerite decided that it was time for her to start homeward. Ralph at once offered his protection, and the two started towards the Mason country mansion. The night was as near to perfection as could be expected on this earth; the trees were but lightly stirring, breathing to each other and to humanity cooling songs of joy. Ralph and Marguerite had the country road to themselves, only an occasional traveler passing them on his way from the village, probably one of those who had attended Mr. Whittleby's church the same evening. The road was dark, the moon not yet having arisen.

"Miss Mason, for some time I have been awaiting this very occasion, and I therefore

thank you for the privilege of your company this evening."

"I appreciate what you say, though do I not hear just a little bit of flattery?" asked Marguerite.

Both had evidently forgotten what had occurred only a few weeks previously; but then that was a few weeks ago, and who would expect a handsome, broad-shouldered man to remember such a trifling thing as a little reproof from a girl? And then also, did she really mean what she said that night? Ralph was not so sure that she did. And in the last several weeks had not Marguerite Mason occasion many more times than was usual to visit the village stores? She dare not be accused of fostering the hope that on those visits she may possibly be rewarded,—but no, Marguerite was an unassuming, innocent-minded girl, and when she visited the village stores purchases were always made.

The two had now reached the country home; on the way home, Marguerite's attempts at discussion of the sermon were as a rule cut short by Ralph, who would mention something entirely foreign to the sermon. She tried to get him to talk of college affairs, or of John Montcalm;

the results were the same, and she was only successful when the conversation turned on the man, Ralph, or the woman, Marguerite. After one of her answers to a question Ralph had asked, the latter flushed; Marguerite could not see his flushed face in the darkness; but the scar! was that the red line of the scar? A cold chill shot over her body, but looking again she saw nothing but the dark outline of the strong, manly looking Ralph before her. The warning was for naught. Upon their arrival at Marguerite's home, as it was not yet late, Marguerite invited Ralph to spend the remainder of the evening with her; the two were soon comfortably seated in a hammock that was stretched between two trees in the yard.

"Miss Mason, if I remember correctly, the last time I saw you in this hammock was on my visit to invite you to Mary's lawn party. Do you remember the little romance you were reading?"

"Yes," replied Marguerite, her voice becoming much subdued. "But, please, don't mention that romance. I suppose you and your friend are enjoying your vacation?"

"O, yes;—but do you remember, just as I was coming into the yard—?"

"Yes," interrupted the girl; "have you heard that our old hack-driver, Dad Johnson, has been fairly carried away with your friend, Mr. Montcalm? They say that where you see the one, there you might look for the other, but I suppose it is not quite so bad."

"That is news, but not surprising; the two would suit each other. But, Miss Mason, as I was saying when you interrupted, just as I myself appeared in your yard that evening, you said that the villain in the book made his appearance."

"True, but why do you so persistently call to mind that story?" asked Marguerite.

"You in your interesting way gave me enough of the story to arouse my curiosity, and I would like to hear the end; of course, even though the villain appeared brandishing his weapon in the face of the defenceless boy, yet the farmer and his sweetheart married and lived happily ever after."

"No, you are wrong," answered Marguerite; "but I prefer to forget that romance, for like many other kinds of dissipation it has left a bad impression which I would rather forget."

"Why, you make me quite anxious to hear from your lips the end of the story; as for the story leaving bad impressions which you would rather forget, can't you realize that it was only a piece of romance, written to be read and then to be forgotten, as are so many of our late novels? And, Miss Mason, the evening is so calm, so quiet, everything so dull, almost absolutely stupid, could you not brighten things a little by a dramatic recital of your romance? I will promise you a very attentive audience."

Marguerite began to yield, and replied that she felt he would be disappointed, and even shocked; but since he was persistent in his request for the recital of the story, she would give it as nearly as she remembered.

"Your audience is ready, Miss Mason, and is prepared for the worst."

The evening grew more quiet, if that were possible; the low, coarse croaking of a bull-frog in a neighboring pond occasionally disturbed the still night. A toad, hopping, struck one of the trees to which the hammock was fastened and fell at the feet of the two in the hammock; it hopped away, unseen.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE story—Mr. Unknown, you remember, I called the rival of the young farmer for the hand of the country maiden. He, Mr. LeFre, for that was the name of the unknown character, had become quite popular among the good, honest country people; on account of his geniality and his ready wit he was welcomed at all social gatherings. Tall, dark, of athletic build, he was attractive to the country folks. Nothing was known concerning him, neither of his past, nor of his present; he had introduced himself to the country people as LeFre, and nothing more would he say concerning himself. Rumors were flying rapidly hither and thither that a nobleman in disguise was among them; hints about fabulous wealth were freely spoken. The authority for such rumors could not be traced. But it was only natural that such a personage, courtly gentleman, should be received, even welcomed by the country folks, whose lives were very dull and monotonous at the best.

And thus it was that he was found at all the country gatherings, Sunday school picnics, horse tradings, and corn huskings. It was at a corn husking, as you will remember, Mr. Whittleby, that you met Mr. Unknown, whom I now introduce to you as Mr. LeFre.

The day after the visit of the young farmer to his sweetheart was one never to be forgotten by the country folks, by the neighbors and friends of the farmer lad. The news was first brought to the 'Cross Road's Store'; here were a store, an inn, and a blacksmith shop; a few isolated houses, and a little church, where was soon to be gathered the largest assemblage in its history. The morning after the country lad's visit to his sweetheart, the blacksmith was busy at his forge, and a few strollers were lounging on the porch of the inn. The dust lay thick on the country road, and the haze of an autumn day was just disappearing.

"What do we see comin' up the road, landlord?" inquired one of the inn loafers.

"The dust certainly do be thick out here on our by-roads," replied the landlord.

But by the time the landlord drolled out his remark about the dust, a horse, panting and

covered with thick foam, had already reached the inn. The rider was a young farmer boy, not more than twelve years old, who had started out early in the morning for the blacksmith shop. The boy was pale and frightened; his words would not come at his will, and if they did come, they were spoken only in confused and stammering jerks. It was some time before the lad could control himself sufficiently well to make himself intelligible.

"Will—there—in the—wood—dead—revolver!"

The poor boy could say nothing further, and he fell fainting to the ground. A little cold water and a swallow of brandy soon restored the little fellow, but all the information that he could give them was simply by pointing his finger down the road. One of the men took the horse that the boy brought, and the landlord jumped upon another that was hitched to a post in front of the inn. LeFre, who was a summer boarder at the inn, having been aroused from his sleep by the excited questions of those around the boy, peeped out between the partly closed shutters of his room, but the hour was still early and he returned to his bed. The two men hav-

ing mounted their horses, started down the road at full gallop. Soon they entered the wood, and having gotten half way through, where the trees were thickest, indeed, so thick that the sun could not penetrate, there they saw the sight which had frightened the lad on the horse.

"Will—there—in the—wood—dead—revolver!"

Yes, there was Will, the young farmer, his head lying in a pool of his own blood, and a revolver in the tight grasp of his hand. His body was rigid; a bullet hole in his right temple. The men became almost as frightened as the boy was, and they both withdrew. They did not know what to do at first, and began to question each other as to the possible reasons for the young farmer taking his life. One of them consented to watch the body, with what fear and trembling on his part will never be known —while the other should report the news. A few hours had passed before the report of the suicide of the young farmer had spread over the surrounding country. But there the body of the dead boy still lay, none knowing what to do, and all afraid to touch the dead body. Their fear and dread of touching the body became

almost amusing. In the midst of their trouble the landlord thought of LeFre.

"Yes, LeFre, get LeFre, he shall tell us what to do."

LeFre was soon brought to the place where the dead boy was, and after expressing great horror at the deed—he declared at the same time that the act of a suicide was a crime—he told some one to drive,—no, he would go himself to the county seat for the coroner and his physician; some one in the meantime was to watch the body; no one was to touch the body; they should leave it just as it was.

The vigil over the dead boy continued the rest of the day; at sunset the coroner came. It was the work of only a few minutes to empanel his jury, and just as the sun sank beneath the western low-land, the jury reached a verdict—Suicide,—cause unknown.

Cause,—Unknown! The young farmer had many friends, but none of them could assign any cause for the strange deed. His sweetheart was confined to her room for several weeks after the tragedy, and would say nothing when questioned about her dead lover. Mr. LeFre left the inn after the funeral, saying that he would

be absent a few weeks on business. The few weeks having passed, he returned and found that the country folks had recovered from the first excitement over the suicide. He himself volunteered to furnish the newly-made mound in the yard beside the church with a stone, properly inscribed. Already held in high regard by the honest country folks, this act made him more popular than ever, and at no place was he made more welcome and treated with greater hospitality than at the home of the dead boy's sweetheart. It was reported that Margie, the country lass, would not see him on his frequent visits; but so much the more anxious were her parents to make him feel welcome. Many weeks had not passed until his visits to the farm house were becoming more frequent than ever, and his name and Margie's were being mentioned together by the neighbor farmers. Indeed, the girl was much to be envied, thought the other country lassies, that the great gentleman should even notice the girl Margie. True, she was the only daughter and would inherit a comfortable income; but Mr. LeFre! A nobleman!

The autumn rapidly passed into winter. LeFre had lengthened his summer through the fall and into the winter months. The winter was a hard one, and social gatherings of the young country people were few. Fortunate, indeed, were those who could care about things other than their own self-preservation. Mr. LeFre had won in his struggle with Margie, and their engagement was announced. Their wedding was arranged for early spring.

Mr. LeFre beside being a prospective son-in-law of the farmer, became also the farmer's financial adviser. On his advice Margie's father had gone deeply into speculation during the winter, and had suffered a few small losses. The farmer was somewhat frightened at the first loss, but was encouraged by LeFre "to keep in." After another loss, heavier than the first one, he wished to withdraw entirely, but he had now become heavily involved, and being further encouraged by the oily tongue and promises of LeFre, he tried it again. The hard times of winter became harder as spring approached; money was becoming so scarce that farms and farm products depreciated to a frightful degree. The final slump came, and in the general ruin

Margie's father was numbered with others who lost fortunes. From the ruins he managed to save enough only to preserve for himself one of his farms, the smallest one; hard work and economy alone saved them from actual want.

After the farmer's failure his attitude towards LeFre was considerably changed; his action was cold, becoming even insolent. On the contrary, Margie became more than ever infatuated with her mysterious lover. The father became more sullen in his attitude towards LeFre, and the latter felt that it was a matter of only a short time until his visits to the farm would be forbidden. LeFre then became haughty in his dealing with the old farmer, and he was finally ordered off the farm; his visits were no longer allowed. He still remained at the inn.

Early spring; the farmer was beginning to feel a new life flow through his veins; he would begin life again and rebuild from the ruins, he concluded.

It was Easter eve. The farmer, his wife and Margie had seated themselves around the table and some of the old time happiness had returned. Margie at times seemed a little depressed, but if her father would notice it she would by some

means divert his attention and burst out into a happy laugh. At bedtime she kissed her parents a "good night" and wished them Easter joys; then she went to her room.

The farmer arose early on the Easter morning, and, filled with the joys of the Easter festival, he was humming to himself an old German Easter carol as his wife came down the stairs. Margie had not yet appeared when the farmer and his wife seated themselves at the breakfast table.

"Mother, it is unusual for Margie to be so late to her breakfast, and especially on Easter Day. Don't you think it would be better to call her?"

The farmer's wife went up to her daughter's room; she was gone for some time, to the farmer it seemed an age. Why was it that he could not free himself from a growing suspicion? But he was wrong, for his wife was now returning. The woman did return, but with the one word, "father," she tottered, and the strong arms of the father prevented her from falling to the floor. Gently placing her on the couch, and after being assured that she had fully recovered from the faint, the farmer hastened to

Margie's room, and there saw the sight that had totally wrecked and aged his wife. Margie's bed had not been occupied during the night and the window was open.

The search for the daughter Margie was long and earnest, but not a trace of her could be found. It was not difficult to guess the cause of her ill-timed flight, for on that same day LeFre had disappeared from the inn, leaving unpaid a bill of several months; the landlord was especially anxious that the "d——d black Frenchman" should be caught. But the two, LeFre and Margie, had completely covered up their tracks. Several months had passed, and the search was unsuccessful.

A year and more had passed; the farmer had partially recovered from his losses, but both he and his wife were growing old. Their life was lonesome, and Margie was sadly missed. In the goodness of their honest hearts they had long ago forgiven whatever wrong Margie had done, and all blame was placed on the rascal, LeFre. One day in the early summer the farmer received a letter from the resident physician of a certain city hospital, asking him to come to the hospital without delay. With great

hope and expectations he immediately started for the hospital, and upon arriving there he was received by the physician who had written to him. The farmer, much bewildered by the active life of the hospital, and not knowing what his mission was to be, trembled as he asked the physician the object of his letter.

"I shall say nothing, sir, but shall simply show you to a room where your coming has been anxiously awaited. But before going in I need inform you that the patient recovered her reason only a few days ago, and she then requested that I write to you. She has been a patient in the nervous department of our hospital for several months."

The physician showed the farmer to a room, and, walking in, the latter at once recognized his daughter, Margie, pale and thin. At his entrance Margie uttered the word "Father," and a smile of contentment spread over her face. The poor old farmer, overcome by the grief of one year, was now ready to take his daughter to his arms, and no questions; but she forbade him.

"No, not until you hear my story; if then you deem me worthy to be a daughter, then—well, God will be good."

"Margie, daughter Margie—"

"Please, oh, please, wait until you hear my story," interrupted Margie; "my heart is almost bursting with the secret, the terrible secret that has been confined within it for, oh, I can't say how long; years, years, years!" Big tears rolled down the girl's cheeks as she motioned her father to a seat at her bedside. For a time she was too much overcome to speak, and when she did begin, she talked more to herself than to her father beside her bed.

"Years? Did I say it was years? Only a little over a year ago I was a happy child, yes, a child of the farm. But years? Did I say it was years? Why was it years? Ah, I see it all now, and I remember it well; that little farm nestled quietly among the hills. Or is my vision of the happy homeland only a dream? Is my life of the past year real? Which is a dream, and which is real? Oh, could I be but convinced that father would forgive—"

"Daughter, I am here; won't you speak to me? Here I am at your bedside." He kissed her forehead, and held her little, white, bloodless hand in his own sturdy hands. This seemed to give her assurance, and closing her eyes, she

passed off into a calm, peaceful sleep, the first she had had for a year or more. The poor old farmer, tired and worn by his journey and weakened by the anguish of the past year, sat there as a guardian angel over his daughter; he dared not stir a muscle lest he should awaken the girl. His back began to ache, his muscles and bones to pain, but he still sat there holding his daughter's hands. His eyelids soon became heavy, and now he had to fight against the sleep that had come to remove him from his present miserable condition. But he continued his vigil, fearing almost to breathe, lest he should awaken his daughter, who, he unconsciously felt, was much in need of a long, quiet sleep. The blood in his arms and hands was now circulating poorly, and every point of his own hands that came into contact with Margie's felt as if he were grasping needles instead of his daughter's hands. But the poor old farmer continued the painful vigil, a painful vigil, indeed, mental and physical. Would he forgive his daughter? For whatever she had done she was forgiven long ago, he said to himself.

"Then a girl, now a woman," he whispered.

Several hours the old man sat there enduring the racking pain and agony necessarily accompanying his forced position. The physician in the meantime had looked through the partly open door, but he quietly walked away. It was growing dark when the farmer's vigil ended. Margie opened her eyes and looked at her father, and smiling she drew him to herself. But she remembered and whispered, "No, not yet; the story first."

She was now fully awake; much refreshed by her long sleep, she asked for some nourishment, which was given to her, and then she began her story.

"It was Easter eve of last year when I left my good parents; ah, I see you remember it. But I want to make my confession brief, for every word will burn me as a hot coal. That night he—I cannot mention his name—came for me, and we went off together. He had always appeared so honorable that I could not understand why he should not come for me by daylight. But he told me that he had just received word from his lawyers in France to the effect that he was heir to a large estate, on condition that he could claim it as an unmarried

man. He declared he would not give me up, and then insisted that we should be married in secret. He declared that he would straighten affairs in France when we should get there, and that then we would send word to you of our marriage. That night we drove many miles to a place unknown to me. He showed me what he called the marriage license, but, entirely trusting him, I did not look at it. The ceremony was performed, and we then spent our days in traveling. Those days would have been entirely happy, if I could only have written to you of our marriage. For several months we lived at a country hotel; it was here that I had my poor eyes opened, that I awoke from my dream, my trance, and saw a devil incarnate. One morning he walked into my room and locked the door. He then told me that until this time he, we had been living on your money, which instead of speculating for you, as you thought he was doing, he was hoarding up for himself; he then told me that that money was now nearly spent, that his France story was a myth, that the wedding itself was a mock-wedding, and that I must now look out for myself. I was par-

alyzed with fear, and overcome with a woman's weakness I fell fainting to the floor. When I recovered, he was gone, and to this day I have heard nothing concerning him. The rest of the story must be brief. I found that he had left me enough money to support me for several months, and I remained at the country hotel, fearing to come home, and hence bearing the burden of the horrible secret myself. The baby was born,—and there my memory fails me until I opened my eyes here a few days ago; and they tell me further that the baby died a few days after its birth. That, dear father, yes, I may say father, for I see nothing in your eyes but kindness and a look of forgiveness—oh, it is more than I can expect!—that is my story, my secret. I did wrong in concealing anything from my good parents who had sheltered and protected me from my youth up; but of all else, with God as my witness, father, I am innocent."

"Margie, my daughter Margie, mother will be so glad to welcome you home. Your visit away from us has been long and strange, but

your room and your plate at the table still await you."

"God is indeed good," added the old man.

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"And there, Mr. Whittleby, the romance ends. Can you wonder that that story, which is enacted in real life so often, I fear, cannot be forgotten as soon as it is read?"

"Marguerite—I beg your pardon, I mean Miss Mason—you told the story so admirably that, should it not be dark, I would swear that you read it from the book."

While telling the story, Marguerite's eyes were directed towards the ground, but now she looked in Ralph's direction. Again an uncomfortable chill shot over her body; this time she could not be mistaken; there was the scar, red, an angry red. She noticed also that Ralph was somewhat restless; he was now changing his position, then got up and walked about for a few minutes.

"Miss Mason," he asked, "may I ask you why you told me that story?"

"Why I told you the story? That is a peculiar question; you asked me to tell it to you, did you not?"

Marguerite trembled as she spoke. A man walking up the gravel path, cheerily whistling, interrupted any further conversation.

"Is Ralph Whittleby anywhere within the confines of this fairy-land?" called out the voice of John Montcalm. Thus announcing himself he was attracted to their direction by Ralph's voice.

"Confound that man, will he always come just where and when he is not wanted?"—this from Ralph in an undertone to himself.

Marguerite was much relieved by John's arrival, for she could not forget the scar.

"I am sorry, indeed, to interrupt you," began John, "but, Ralph, your father fainted away shortly after he returned from the church this evening, and though he was fully recovered when I left, your mother thought it best that I should come for you."

The two left, and Marguerite, still somewhat nervous, retired to her room, but several hours passed before she fell asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

"MR. MONTCALM, I am much worried about father's condition; since Saturday night he walks about the house and yard as though he were entirely devoid of ambition, almost of life itself. He seemed not to have suffered any severe consequences from his attack of unconsciousness last Sunday evening, but I do not like his general actions. At dinner to-day you probably noticed that he scarcely touched his food; I don't see what can be the matter with him."

"Oh, surely there can be nothing seriously wrong with your father, Miss Whittleby," replied John in a tone, however, which indicated that he did not believe what he said; "what your father needs is a good rest; more fresh air, sunlight, exercise. Why don't you have him take a few weeks' vacation, absolute withdrawal from his work?"

A few days had passed since Reverend Mr. Whittleby had fainted away. John and Mary were out driving.

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The day's work was over, and the household duties finished; the day was a busy one at the parsonage; fruits to preserve and berries to convert into jellies, in both of which arts Mary and her mother were skilled. When the evening came, the mother with Josie took seats on the vine-covered porch, the little fellow entertaining his mother with his childish prattle. The Reverend Mr. Whittleby had also seated himself beside his wife and little son on the porch. Ralph went out calling for the evening. Mary and John walked upon the porch together.

"Father," asked Mary, "how are you feeling this evening?"

"All right, daughter," he replied, brushing his hand over his forehead as though he had pain in that region; "I am all right, daughter. Ralph, did you tend to Dolly at supper time?"

"This is not Ralph, Mr. Whittleby," answered John.

"Oh, yes, I see; why, how could I have made that mistake? Josie, will you run into the house for my glasses? My eyes are getting a little poor, so that I need my glasses constantly—" he again brushed his hand over his forehead, and continued, "yes, I am all right,

daughter. But, Mary, the evening is very fine; the moon shall be high, and Dolly has not been used for several days; why not have Mr. Montcalm take you out driving?"

"Since you are seated with the family circle this evening, we shall enjoy joining you, shall we not, Miss Whittleby?" and John began to walk to a seat.

"Nonsense, nonsense, where is Ralph? Have him get the carriage. I shall sit here for only a few moments at the most, and then I must finish a little writing that I have to do in the study. But go, children, go and exercise Dolly."

And thus persuaded by both Mr. and Mrs. Whittleby, it was the work of only a few minutes for John to have the carriage at the front porch. He assisted Mary into the carriage and the two drove off. The conversation was about Mr. Whittleby and his condition.

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"Yes, what your father needs," continued Mr. Montcalm, "is a rest and change of scene. And I believe he is beginning to realize that himself, as is indicated by his seating himself on the porch this evening with your mother and

Josie; that you know is a little strange, at least so it seems to me, for since I have been here I have not yet seen him resting on the porch in the evening, enjoying God's pure air."

"I hope you are right, and that there is nothing wrong with father. But he certainly does need a rest; I can hardly remember when he last took a vacation; it seemed to me that father was a little bit nervous, more so than usual when I asked him how he was feeling. Did you notice it, or was it only my too vivid imagination at work?"

"I did wonder at his mistaking me for Ralph, but then you remember he did not have on his glasses, and it was growing dark. Miss Whittleby, less study is what your father needs, less theology; less about God, but more of God, more of His pure, fresh, life-giving air." John began to whistle as he urged Dolly to take a more rapid pace.

"They drove on in silence for awhile; their course took them up the hill that led out the eastern end of the village. Upon reaching the top of the hill they entered a thick wood. It was now quite dark, but the moon was rising. The two in the carriage were in full sympathy

with the summer evening. They were alone with nature, alone until they passed a little camp of gypsies after they had reached the top of the hill. The band of gypsies were seated on the ground around the front end of their tents; they seemed to be in earnest conversation. One of their number, a woman, was weeping, and another started towards the carriage as Mary and John drove by; but he returned slowly to the camp. An ugly, dirty looking lot of wretches they appeared to the two in the carriage. "One of the black spots in humanity's book," John remarked, pointing to the camp. "What a contrast they are to the evening, which is one of sublime beauty and quietness."

"True, indeed; I have just been thinking as we were driving along; surrounded thus by the works of a Divine Creator, when in close communion with nature as we now see it about us, who, indeed, can be so deaf to the voice of his inner conscience as to deny the existence of a God? My intellect cannot tell me to believe in a God, but I can, nay, I must feel that there is a God. Mr. Montcalm, what do you think about it? You scientific men I know are trying

to explain away the existence of and the necessity for a God."

"That, Miss Whittleby, is one of the slanders against men of science; I was interested in what you were saying, and agreed with you until you uttered that common belief that is held against men of science. When will people learn that scientific men hold nothing to be so unscientific as the denial of a creative being, a God? But I fear that we shall get a little too deep in this subject, so I suppose it would be better for us to talk of something that will perhaps be more congenial to one of your sex."

"To one of my sex," repeated Mary; "that is the way it always is with you men; we poor females are for the kitchen alone, while you men, you of the so-called sterner sex, are for learned discussions."

"Now, Miss Whittleby, do not misunderstand me. I do not mean to undervalue the mind of woman; no, my respect for her is too high and sincere, but I was just wondering why it was that on such a beautiful night as this—the moon shines for the romantic, does it not?—we should become gray-haired theologians and

discuss subjects that at the very best can be but speculative."

"You may not credit me with such a desire, but I have been waiting for some such opportunity as this to question you on your beliefs, your ideas."

"My beliefs, or my unbeliefs, which?" asked John, laughing.

"Mr. Montcalm, I shall be perfectly frank and honest with you. You may not be aware of the fact, but before you reached our village there were certain rumors afloat in regard to your beliefs; it was even reported that you were a skeptic, that you were an unbeliever. This I am sure worried father not a little. I resolved, therefore, to ask you about it at my first opportunity and learn for myself if there were any basis for such reports. Since you have been here I have learned only that you were devoting especial attention to the college scientific course. Now has my time come, and, therefore, Mr. Montcalm, I ask you to stand before the court. Guilty, or not guilty?" asked Mary, trying to assume not too serious a look.

"So I am on trial for my life, am I, and before such a fair judge, too?"

"No, your belief is on trial, and not before a judge at all, but before one who confesses an interest in such things as are held by the so-called higher critics, and by the professors of this much talked of new theology."

"How those rumors which you mentioned, Miss Whittleby, could have spread throughout the village is more than I can understand. I, a skeptic! But I see that you wish to know something about my beliefs, and I shall, therefore, be a willing prisoner before such a fair judge. I must confess that I did hear something about such rumors. Good old Dad Johnson said that he 'guessed from what that consarned old Deacon Smith said I was on the straight road to perdition, and was on the express train, too.' No, Miss Whittleby, please do not think me on that express train of Deacon Smith's. To be brief, I do not accept some of the old cut and dried theories and doctrines of the old orthodox school, many of which I believed as a child. As a child I believed them and was satisfied; but with my physical growth, my mind, my reason also developed. God gave me the simple mind of a child, when I was a child, and with that mind I was naturally satisfied with everything that

was told me. Grimm's and Andersen's fairy tales had as much fascination for me as the wonderful stories of the Old Testament of the Bible; to me they were all true. But as I grew into manhood, God gave me a reason which was not satisfied with things, with statements that were contrary to my reason, and I rebelled. I first rebelled against my reason, and tried to believe things told me, or at least say I believed things which were plainly against my reason. But that period soon passed, and now I am thankful to say that I—and I believe that there are many, many others, some of whom as yet fear to express their beliefs, and some outspoken—have become at least rational in my beliefs."

"This is interesting; please go on," said Mary, as John paused for a moment.

"Well, then, Miss Whittleby, as far as my belief, my trust in a God, a Divine Creator, are concerned, I think I have said enough for you to know my views in that respect. It is simply impossible not to believe in a God; we must believe in Him, whether we wish to or not; we are born with that belief as surely as we are born with a mind, a brain, or any of the physical organs. We have a creation; there must have

been a Creator. As to the character of the Creator and His method of creation, our beliefs may vary. And shall we who think for ourselves, who do not accept statements merely because they are in the Bible, shall we be censured, shall we be called skeptics, heretics, because we dare to interpret things as our reason prompts us? Now, Miss Whittleby, let us take a few examples over which there has been much contention, and let us apply our reason, our common sense to them."

"But, Mr. Montcalm," interrupted Mary, "is our reason an infallible guide in the search after truth?"

"If not absolutely infallible, it is the most infallible guide we have; at least it most certainly is a more infallible guide than any book, I care not what it is, which has been written a long time ago, written by men unlearned in such sciences as astronomy, geology and biology, written at a time when superstition ran rampant, when it was as common for men to see angels and heavenly beings flying through the air as it is for us to see birds. Take from us our reason, and what are we? No more, indeed, than the beasts of the field. Granting then that our reason is the best guide we have in our search for

truth, let us apply our reason to some of the great questions which have agitated great theologians, and see where we land."

"I suppose, then, it is needless for me to ask if you are an evolutionist," remarked Mary.

"Why, certainly I am; though many people are far back in their thinking upon other subjects, yet most people are advanced enough to agree that in dealing with the theory of evolution we are no longer dealing with a vague and hazy theory. Evolution is a fact conclusively proved."

"Conclusively proved? Can you prove it?" inquired Mary.

"Has it ever been proved, has anyone ever attempted to prove that man was created by God as if by magic from the dust of the earth in a few moments of time, just as the child makes the image of a man from the mud with which it is playing? On the contrary, wherever geology, biology, and the allied sciences have come into conflict with the alleged, the literal teachings of the book of Genesis, for instance, as to the method of the creation, the sciences have won signal triumphs. It was formerly believed that the sun and the moon were created to be mere

appendages of the earth, this insignificant little earth of ours; formerly to believe that the sun was the center of the solar system was to disbelieve Scriptures. Suppose the author of the book of Joshua, whoever he was, had been an astronomer, would, do you think, Joshua then have commanded the sun to stand still? No, Miss Whittleby, my reverence for the Creator, who made laws and then kept them Himself, who observed law and order in man's creation, my reverence for Him is, indeed, greater than if by some process of magic He would have created man directly from the dust of the earth."

"Your arguments are good, Mr. Montcalm; but if evolution implies a continuous, progressive change, as I understand it does from the reading of the book you loaned me on this subject, how, then, can you reconcile man's fall, surely a backward movement, to evolution, a progressive movement?"

"I see that the old teaching is still holding you to the Adam and Eve, the garden of Eden, and the serpent story. And yet, Miss Whittleby, I don't think your case is quite hopeless. But I shall answer your question by asking you one; did Adam really fall at all? Was what

we call his fall really a fall, or rather was it not that stage of his evolutionary development when he awoke to the fact that he had a moral as well as a physical being? Man had, therefore, been sinning, had been eating of the forbidden fruit long before his recorded fall, only he did not know it until his moral nature was developed. Was not man's fall, therefore, merely another great step in his rise?"

"Well, then, I almost fear to ask you how you regard the Old Testament of the Bible; do you not regard it as history?"

"No, emphatically no; allegory, parables, fables, all mixed with history. But why should you fear to ask me the question?" John looked intently at Mary as he asked the question.

"For this reason: It seems to me that I am on very uncertain ground, with one foot on the old and one on the new. You know for some people the Bible is their religion."

"Yes, and what a hard, cold, selfish religion it is, too," replied John; "no, Miss Whittleby, Christ did not come to this earth to found a religion based on the Old Testament. Christ came to this earth and found it steeped in sin and corruption, and at once He took the part of

a reformer. The religion of Christ is not one of hard doctrine, but one of good deeds. There is now much contention about the personality of Christ, as you know. Now, for myself, I do not find much difficulty in this matter; I may be all wrong, it is true, and yet my reason does not censure me. For instance, there are many who hold that Christ is divine, because of a mysterious, miraculous birth; now, that I cannot believe. If Christ was divine, His divinity did not consist in an immaculate conception. No, He was born a man among men, and as a man He had to have human parents. Christ did not teach any such hard doctrine concerning His birth, and therefore why should men try to force such a doctrine upon persons who down in their hearts cannot honestly believe it? I believe that Christ was divine, just as I believe that the element of divinity exists in every new-born babe. I might say that I believe that there was something unique in Christ's divinity which we cannot understand. Man is divine, Christ is more divine; but besides being thus divine, Christ was the most perfect man the world has ever known; He is our model of perfect manhood. Or let me put it this way,

Christ was perfectly divine, and divinely perfect; *in Him, indeed, dwells the fulness of the Godhead.* Now, could not such a personage formulate a system of ethics which it would be safe for us to follow? No, Miss Whittleby, Christ Himself did not say that His followers should believe in any one doctrine; He did not say that our salvation depended on doctrinal belief. His law was an improvement on the old Mosaic law; this I believe to be His law,—Love thy neighbor as thyself. That is Christ's religion, and that is the religion that we should all try to live; we must, indeed, live our religion, and I believe that if we follow Christ's example and try to do all the good we can in this world, we need not be much troubled about the world hereafter. If we do not make a heaven here on earth for ourselves and for others, we certainly need not expect to find a heaven in the next world. But, Miss Whittleby, I find that I am monopolizing the conversation, and I beg your pardon."

"No, on the contrary, I have been very much interested in what you were saying, and I must say this much that I feel that you are sincere and honest in what you said. So much can-

not be said of many of the ministers in the pulpit, I fear."

"But I am not a minister in the pulpit; perhaps if I were, and if my bread and butter depended upon pleasing my congregation, then I, too, would be a little more careful in expressing my opinions."

"No, Mr. Montcalm, I could not imagine you preaching anything but what you believe to be true," answered Mary.

It was growing late, and in the midst of their discussion the two had turned and started on their homeward journey. The moon was full, and was now directly overhead; the light was therefore bright, and the gypsy camp could be distinctly seen as they reached the top of the hill which overlooked the village.

"It is time that our gypsy friends had closed their camp for the night," said Mary as they approached the camp, "but they seem to be very much awake. Look, what are they doing?"

The carriage was now opposite the camp, and John stopped Dolly. In the bright light of the moon, from the carriage they could see a little procession of eight or ten gypsies on its way to the depths of the wood. The procession

was quiet; only a muffled weeping could be heard. John was curious and drove up to the camp; he then saw the nature of the procession. One of their number had died, and at midnight they were secretly burying him. At first the leader of the gypsies was not willing to give this information to John, and only after much questioning did John learn that this was the third death among their number.

"There they are buried, sir," answered the leader of the gypsy band, "our queen, the boy, and that one there now to be buried. Ah, their death, their death! The village did not know, sir, the village did not know. The fever, the fever has placed our good queen under the earth. Ah, sir, who shall be next? The fever, sir, the fever; they burn up in it, their bodies and their souls. The fever, sir, the fever."

CHAPTER IX.

THE next day a hot July sun began to beat down upon a dry earth, and though it was yet early in the morning, the loungers of Hilldale were seeking cool places and palm leaf fans. The atmosphere was filled with moisture, and those who were at their work felt a sense of oppressiveness that was unusual for the Maryland village. Hilldale had gained a reputation that was more than local for its warm, dry climate; its health was remarkably good, and during the summer months the local hotels, the village inn and improvised boarding places were filled with boarders who sought to forget the city's bustle and heat in the quiet, more cool and dry climate of the village. Old Dad Johnson was the village's best advertiser; he never grew tired of singing the praises of the village and its health.

"Yep, we couldn't fill our graveyard with our own people, for they won't die; no, they won't die worth a cent. Our babies, bless the kids, grow up to be men and women, and they marry

and then grow old with their own youngsters; then they become grand-mammies and grand-daddies, growing older all the time, until one of the real old ones becomes ashamed to look an honest graveyard in the face, and this one then quietly lays down with his toes turned up. And then the school gits another holly-day, and if it is summer, but law me, no one with any common decency wouldn't die in summer time; in summer time you never can't keep the dead bodies long enough to give the willage folks time to see the remains, and that seems to be powerful interestin' to some of the willage people, gossips and wags for the most; as fur me, when old Dad's pump stops runnin', he hain't to be made no show of, so he hain't; it ain't decent. Of course, as I was tellin' youse, there ain't many people dyin' in our willage, and when one does die, then the whole willage is curious. But you kin bet on our climate any day; you kin come from your city and do nothin' but rest; there hain't nothin' to do but rest. You kin sleep all night with nothin' to disturb your dreams but the frogs, and you know their singin' is quietin' like. Yep, we got the willage of willages."

Old Dad was nearing Hilldale on this July morning with a hack load of summer boarders whom he had met on the early train. To such occupants of his hack Dad was especially careful in his praise of the village; many an extra twenty-five cent piece was slipped in Dad's pocket by a grateful passenger who felt that the entertainment given by the loquacious old driver on the way to the village was worth that amount, and sometimes even more. Of course, Dad always spoke to the person who took a seat beside him, but those in the back part of the hack had no difficulty in hearing all he said.

"Look here, Mr. Johnson," said the sharer of his seat, who evidently was coming to the village to find new nerves and generally renewed health, "you have spoken so well of your village climate that I am forced to ask you if this particular morning is a fair sample; if it is, then I shall proclaim to the world that the hack-driver of a certain Maryland village is a most imaginative prevaricator, and I myself shall be a passenger on your next trip to the station. How about it, Mr. Johnson?"

"If this weather don't change in the shake of a sheepse's tail, mister, and if you don't be

askin' your landlady fur exter kivers in a night or two, then I promise to carry the whole lot of you back to the station, and I won't take a cent; you see, mister, we don't be very fur from the mountains, and the mountain breezes will soon make you think of exter bed kivers. Yes, this surely do be hot," and old Dad mopped his honest forehead with a red bandana that had done service almost as long as the hack itself.

"But, Mistah Johnson, is the village clean? Do you observe all the rules of modern sanitation? Or is the village air contaminated with odors that would be expected naturally to accompany an absence of a proper sewage system?" The voice came from a little dried-up specimen of humanity, a wizened old man who looked as if he might have been raised on bad odors.

"Bless your soul, sir; dirt and smells of no kind could be found if you was to go over the whole willage with your mother's fine tooth comb," and saying this old Dad suddenly began to shake with laughter, long repeated peals of hearty laughter. The hack was shaken more by Dad's big laughing body than it was by the rough country road. His face, big and round as the full moon, was red; creeks and rivulets of

perspiration rolled over his forehead, down his face, and were finally lost in the plaits of his negligee shirt.

"Talkin' about odors, is it? Is it smells you do be talkin' and askin' about?" continued Dad as he stopped his laughing and chuckling; "well, my good friend back there in the hack, there was once a odor, a common every-day smell; but you haven't heerd about it, I guess, have you? Then you do be a stranger to this willage. Well, it came about this way. You won't be in the willage long before you hear about Deacon Smith, the onriest cuss in the willage; now, I hain't given much to talkin' about persons, but you may as well learn it fust as last, that the deacon is the meanest, stingiest person that ever wore white skin on the outside; his orter to be black. The little city chaps always ketch onto the deacon when they reach the willage, and they take fun in pesterin' the old man. The deacon has a saddler shop, and one day two of the little city chaps and Josie, the minister's kid, walked into the deacon's shop. Old Smith licked one of the city chaps the summer before, and the youngster swore as how he would get even with the deacon. The deacon is a elder,

or maybe a deacon, or somethin' like that in Josie's Dad's church, and he is a pious old critter; so these three youngsters walked into the deacon's shop, and the kid that was licked ran up to the deacon, threw his little arms around him and said somethin' like this,—'Oh, good deacon Smith, I am very glad to see you; you whipped me last summer, and I want to tell you that I deserved it, and mamma said that I should thank you, fur it made me a better boy,'—them's the kid's wery words. This pleased the old deacon, and he gave them seats; but the boys didn't stay wery long. Soon Ed Ganton, the willage loafer, came in. 'Huh, deacon, what smells so? Sorter like decayed rats; I think that I must be goin'.' Billy Wilson, the grocer, then stopped in but, puttin' his handkerchief to his nose, he walked out, sayin' his nose was bleedin'. Then Ralph Whittleby, the minister's oldest son, went in for some harness. 'Good Lord, Smith, what have you buried in your shop? I'll come for the harness to-morrow.' Now the old deacon was pretty much riled; havin' been in the shop the whole time, he couldn't smell much, but he thinks to himself as how he will be on the safe side, so unbeknowns to any one he went to the

kitchen and washed his feet. His wife happens to see him, and thinks he is crazy that he should be doin' that,—it was three days before Sunday, she told a neighbor woman,—or maybe he was sick; 'so,' as she told the neighbor woman, 'I follows the old man into the shop, and such a smell it would most have knocked you down; pap, says I, pap, are you sick, as I put my hand on his back, and then I was goin' to knock off a fly what had perched on my nose, and law me, that smell! Pap, says I, what's on your back? And there was his back smeared from head to foot with that Limburger cheese!' Well, old Smith is even yet called 'Limburger Smith.'"

Again old Dad put in service the old red bandanna, and the hearty laughter of Dad and the occupants of the hack could be heard in the village, as the hack was slowly approaching the top of the hill.

On the same morning that old Dad brought the hack load of summer boarders from the station, John arose early, and after breakfast he said that he was going out for a little walk, remarking that he wanted to look for specimens of a certain flower that was said to grow in that part of Maryland, and that he had long wished

to add it to his herbarium. The minister had not yet come town to breakfast. At the breakfast table Mrs. Whittleby had made the remark that her husband had gone to the study on the previous evening after Mary and John had left in the carriage, but that he did not stay very long.

"Indeed, he had been gone only a very short time," she continued, "when he returned saying that he had never known his study to be so warm; he said he had thought it was warmer than usual on the previous evening, but last evening it was warmer than ever. Even then your poor father said he would have worked a little longer, but his nose began to bleed slightly, and on that account he came over to the kitchen for water. Having a little headache, he went to bed. Your father is just about worn out, so we shall let him sleep as long as he wishes this morning; therefore, Josie, don't you make any unnecessary noise around the house."

The conversation at the breakfast seemed to make John all the more anxious to take the walk after his breakfast; it had been his custom since his visit in the village to read the morning paper to Mrs. Whittleby and Mary as they were

clearing away the breakfast dishes. But this morning he begged to be excused, saying that he wished to look for the flowers before it got so very warm.

John left the parsonage, depressed, indeed almost overcome by the sultry morning and also by his own thoughts, the latter on this particular morning being worse than the heat itself. He was extremely anxious to get away from the breakfast table, after he had heard what Mrs. Whittleby said about her husband, fearing lest his anxious thoughts might be revealed on his face. He started for the east road of the village, and then, forgetting the heat and his melting collar, he began to mount the hill which he had ascended and descended not many hours ago with Mary Whittleby. What a strange conversation they had last evening while driving, he thought; and yet that thought lingered only for the moment, for it was crowded out by other and more important thoughts. He saw the midnight procession of gypsies on the dead march, and remembered the gypsy's words, "They burn up in it, their bodies and their souls; the fever, sir, the fever." To John, now

walking up the hill, these words returned as a ghastly, death-dealing specter.

"Horrible, horrible—" he was speaking to himself, and perspiration, due rather to a sudden sense of fear than to the heat of the sun, stood on his forehead in big drops. "And the village did not know it," the leader of the gypsy band had said.

John was now almost up the hill; he stopped to rest for a moment. Turning around, he looked down upon the village; he could not see it as clearly as he had expected to, for a haze seemed to have settled over the little town. Looking towards the sun, he saw in its place a large red ball shining through the haze; or can it be smoke? he thought, It, whatever it was, smoke or haze, was beginning to cover the village as a huge blanket, and now he could see the village only very indistinctly, only its general outline was preserved. Mountain fires, it may be, he thought; whatever it was, John, as he viewed the village from the top of the hill, became troubled in mind. He suddenly felt himself quite alone; there he was at the top of the road leading to Hilldale, at a not much greater distance than a stone's throw from the

village, and yet he seemed to be separated from the little town as completely as if he were in another country. He became more troubled, and hurried to the top of the hill. His rapid thoughts gave fresh vigor to his feet.

"Horrible," he said to himself, "if true; a city located at the foot of a hill, with a dam on the top of the hill, the dam holding its gallons of water by the millions, if the dam were to break, that city could hardly be in a more dangerous location than yonder village, if what I suspect is true. But it cannot be; and yet three of their number died. How long could they have been there? 'The village did not know; the fever, sir, the fever; they burn up in it.'" These words of the gypsy whirled through John's mind, and for the moment he became dazed. But, feeling that he alone was in possession of the secret, if secret it was, he knew that he had to act swiftly, if he should act at all. Then his thoughts ran back to the breakfast table, to the words of Mrs. Whittleby; the minister's study was so warm that he could not remain in it; could he escape the heat by leaving the study? asked John of himself, and he did not wait for an answer, for his thoughts

were traveling too fast to wait for answers. The minister went to bed with a headache, and his study was too warm! Then John remembered the words of his mother as she once described the death of his father, and the death of many another husband and father when the fever struck the city. Then John's thoughts ran back to the breakfast table once more, and he saw seated around the table the different members of the minister's family, except the minister; there was Mrs. Whittleby and Mary—but he need go no further, the memory of her face was enough to urge him on, and he ran up the hill and quickly entered the wood.

He looked intently for the camp after entering the wood. The camp was gone! Again John's mind began to whirl; he became dazed. Was the gypsy camp scene, his ride with Mary, was all that a dream? Was he going crazy? He had now reached the place where the camp was located. No, he was not mistaken; it was true. The camp and the gypsies were gone, but there were unmistakable evidences that this particular spot had been occupied by the most wretched, the vilest, the most loathsome, the dirtiest of human creatures. A few paces off

into the wood John saw three newly made graves. He grew sick at heart as he walked back to the camp. The gypsy band had left no traces of their identity, nothing except filth and dirt, a human cess-pool, and an odor-impregnated atmosphere that staggered him for the moment. He again turned towards the three graves, then, beginning to retrace his steps, he hastened towards the village at the foot of the hill.

"The fever, sir, the fever;" these words flew through John's mind and added speed to his feet.

CHAPTER X.

JOHN had returned from his walk to the gypsy camp, and found the minister's family variously engaged. The minister himself had not yet come down stairs; he had made a request for water, and as John entered the yard Josie was on his way upstairs with a pitcher of iced water.

"Josie, my little man, is not that pitcher a little too heavy for you? Suppose you would let it fall, then Papa Whittleby would not get his water; here, let me carry it for you," and saying this he took both Josie and the pitcher in his arms and walked up to Mr. Whittleby's room. The minister was still in bed, and as John appeared in the room a smile of welcome ran over his face.

"Ah, the rattling of the ice in the pitcher brings a promise of relief, Mr. Montcalm." John thought he could feel the heat of the breath that accompanied the sigh of the minister as he spoke.

"Thank Josie for the water, Mr. Whittleby," replied John.

"What a rich blessing we have in pure, cold water," said the minister as he drank eagerly from the glass handed to him; his lips and tongue seemed dry and parched, as he continued, "I can't understand my condition, Mr. Montcalm; I have no particular pain, except a little headache, but I seem perfectly satisfied to stay in bed, no ambition, nothing except this thirst, and, I may add, a lack of appetite. But I hope to feel better towards evening, after resting in bed the remainder of the day. Will you please tell Mrs. Whittleby that I shall remain in bed until supper time?"

"Is there anything else that I may do for you, Mr. Whittleby?" asked John, now walking to the door, taking Josie with him. The minister did not answer; he brushed his hands over his forehead and turned his head towards the wall, thus avoiding the light.

The afternoon of this July day was a quiet one in Hilldale; it was hot and sultry, and the village was practically dead. The long street was deserted; the shutters of the houses were closed, and the blinds were pulled down to the window-sill to prevent the sun from entering the already over-heated rooms. Those whom work

kept busy worked slowly and listlessly; all the rest, those whose work was completed, were spending the July afternoon behind closed doors, in the shade, reading, sleeping, loafing.

It was in the middle of the afternoon; the heat of the sun seemed to be increasing, and as John walked up the street and entered the parsonage yard he looked the picture of discomfort. His face was red and was covered with beads of perspiration; he carried his coat over his arm, and entering the sitting-room, threw it on the chair.

"Where have you been this afternoon, Mr. Montcalm?" inquired Mary; "this is the coolest place I have been able to find; sit down and make yourself comfortable."

"This does look cool and comfortable, indeed; what are you reading, Miss Whittleby?" John remained standing, holding his hat in his hand.

"A book, quite suitable for a hot afternoon such as this; make yourself as comfortable as possible, and I shall attempt to entertain you with it at the same time; or, if I cannot entertain you, I can probably read you to sleep. Why

don't you sit down? There, throw yourself on that rocker."

"I would like to very much, but I have a little errand to do this afternoon, so, please, don't tempt me. When I think of the sun's rays beating down upon the top of that old hack, I almost wish that I had not promised Dad Johnson to make the trip with him to the station this afternoon."

"Now, what could induce you to go out this hot afternoon, Mr. Montcalm, when it is not necessary?"

"But it is necessary, Miss Whittleby; well, no, not exactly necessary," said John, recovering himself, "but I told Dad that I would make the trip with him, and I don't like to disappoint him. However, I suppose Dad can keep us both cool with his stories. Good-bye, Miss Whittleby, and won't you please reserve some cool place for me this evening where I can enjoy your company?"

"Answer my question, Mr. Montcalm, and I promise to hunt the coolest place in the yard, yes, in the village,—what is taking you to the station this afternoon with Dad if it is not

necessary? Surely you would not go just to be with old Dad; surely, you would not leave—"

"Leave this room, and you, Miss Whittleby, for old Dad? Have you not learned, or if you have not learned, have you not had suspicions, —but no, I dare not say more just now, for my duty is elsewhere this afternoon; yes, Miss Whittleby, it would be a pleasure, a privilege for me to remain with you this afternoon, but since you ask it, I can say now only that it is necessary that I make this trip to the station with Dad; the reason I shall tell you later, but I must be going now, or I may miss the hack. Good-bye, Miss Whittleby, until I return." John left the room; the seriousness of his actions and words struck Mary as being a little strange, at least not like the Mr. Montcalm she was beginning to esteem for his genial, open, frank disposition, and in whose company she felt strangely at peace both with herself and the rest of the world.

John had promised to make this especial trip with old Johnson on this particular afternoon; but he had made the promise only as he stood talking to Mary. Dad Johnson had often told John that he would "always find a seat

wacant aside old Dad on his trips to and fro the station where they could swap stories;" considering this an invitation that held good during his visit to the village, he felt at liberty in thus promising Dad mentally, while talking with Mary, to make the trip on this hot July afternoon. He wanted to see Dad; in fact he must see Dad; he needed Dad's help, and he needed it at once. He could not find a better opportunity to talk to the old hack-driver than on this trip to the station; and besides he wanted to send a message by telegraph, and for that he had to go to the station. All this he would tell Mary, John said to himself, in the evening, if opportunity would offer itself. But he must now hasten to see if Dad had "a wacant seat" this afternoon to "swap stories;" swap stories! ah, the story he had to swap this afternoon was not of the nature of old Johnson's, but his story had to be told, and he felt that he could expect the best help from old Dad. Dr. Lambdon, to whom he naturally would have told his secret first, had left the village a few weeks ago; his practice was naturally light during the summer months, and at the time he left for his vacation trip abroad it was lighter even

"MY OLD HACK A KERRYIN' OF DEAD FOLKS!"

than usual; only a few old chronic cases which he left in charge of Dr. Arnold; the latter was an old man, practically worn out both as to his body and his methods. He might be safe for chronic cases, John thought, but at present John could place no confidence in him, even though he were "the children's friend."

As John walked down the village street, no one or nothing was to be seen, except the old hack standing in front of the combined drug store and post office. John walked up to the hack as Johnson was coming out of the store with the mail bag.

"Well, Dad, I see you have a light load this afternoon; how would you like to swap stories?"

"Jump up, John, and jump up at onct, fur if you stand there fur too long, you might change your mind; purty hot, you know. But jump on, John, jump on. Exceptin' a few flies, and a bumble-bee or two, we won't have no custom this afternoon."

The two men jumped up to the seat and the hack started down the village street. No sound greeted the hack driver and his companion, except the rattle of the hack and the clatter of the

horses' hoofs; all else was quiet along the village street.

"Gee-whitaker, but the sun do be hot; we orter brung along cabbage leaves fur our hats; they say cabbage leaves drive off sun-stroke. But, lad, I suppose we kin stand the heat."

"Yes, Dad; but there are worse things than heat. Suppose I were to tell you that I am a prophet, and that I had a vision, and in that vision I saw half of your village struck down with the fever, that half of the village was sick with it; that the boarders were fleeing panic-stricken; that it was as common for us to see the bodies of the dead carried to the graves as now it is uncommon; suppose that in this vision I saw the village dying so fast, Dad, that it became necessary to convert the old hack into a hearse, and—"

"Hold on, lad, hold on; you do be talkin' strange! My old hack, what has been kerryin' live folks fur twenty years comin' this December, kerryin' dead folks! When that comes my name won't be Hezekiah Johnson! No, lad, I don't believe in no wisions and prophets, and as fur back as I kin recerlect no one in our village never had the fever. No, my lad, don't

talk strange like that; my old hack kerryin' dead folks!"

"But, Dad," again began John, "suppose I were to tell you that this vision of mine is already coming to pass, and there is one even at this moment stricken with the fever; and, worse yet, that three have already died and were buried in secret!"

"Man, man, what are you sayin'? Be keerful; don't be jokin' about such things; don't be jokin' about the dead. What do you mean, lad? Strange talkin', strange talkin' that I do be heerin'! No, lad, the fever won't never tech our willage."

"But, Dad," John began once more, "it, I fear, is only too true, and unless you and I, now listen, Dad, unless you and I"— John was talking with a firm, commanding tone—"work, and work hard, and work at once, we may need your old hack for a hearse. Now, Dad, listen; in—the — next — six and more — weeks — there — shall—be—no—time—for—stories—or play — nothing but work—day and night."

Old Johnson looked up, now thoroughly alarmed. The last words of John sounded like the death sentence itself. No stories? No play?

Work, day and night? What terrible sentence was John pronouncing upon the dear old village, that village which old Dad for years had associated with nothing but stories and plays?

"Yes, Dad," continued John, "I mean just what I am saying; I fear we are too late to prevent the fever from reaching the town and striking down many of the poor village people (Dad looked back toward the village as though he expected to see the grim figure of Death walking up the village hill, scythe in hand), but we can attempt to prevent the worst; and, if the worst does come, as I fear it will, then, Dad, we must meet it as best we can."

"Lad, lad John, are you gone mad? Has the heat gone to your head? What strange things are you sayin'? Lad, wake from your dreamin' and tell me that nothin' won't happen to that little willage of ours, that little willage where we grow from children to old age. No, lad, you do be dreamin'; the heat be turnin' your head."

Poor old Johnson was now thoroughly frightened; if what John was saying should come to pass, then he feared for the village; if it were

the heat in reality that was turning John's head, then old Dad had for his solitary companion a madman; in the latter case he felt helpless, and therefore continued, "Lay yourself down back there in the hack, where it is cooler than here, lad; cool yourself off, my boy, and then you won't talk that way of our willage. No, lad, the good Lord who keers fur His children won't be allowin' such things to fall upon the willage. Come, lad, say that you be only jokin'."

This request of the old man's was almost an appeal, a pathetic appeal; he looked back into the hack as though he expected to see victims of the fever packed closely together on their way to burial. He saw nothing but an empty hack, and was happy for the moment.

"Now, listen, Dad, to what I have to say, and as a great deal depends upon us two, on how you and I keep our heads, let us understand the situation thoroughly. So, good old Dad, get it out of your head that I am dreaming, or that the heat has turned my head. I did not see a vision, Dad, but I did see something worse than a vision, a camp deserted by wretched gypsies, a camp filled with dirt and filth, and that camp will be the cause of much sorrow in the village.

The abominable wretches had kept their presence above the village a secret, until last night when I accidentally discovered them; this morning, Dad, they are gone, but they have left behind them three newly made graves containing as many victims of that scourge, the fever. Right there, above the village, was the camp, and the village will now reap what those rascals have sown, yes, literally sown in that camp."

John was as much excited as Dad was frightened, and he proceeded to give Dad an account of his and Mary's drive on the previous evening; he told him everything he had seen, and gave Dad the result of the inference which he had drawn from what he had seen.

Poor old Johnson began to realize that he must believe John's words as true, though he trembled as the truth was forced upon him. It was true, as Dad had told John, that for years, indeed in Dad's memory, the health of Hilldale was remarkably good, that Hilldale was gaining more than a local reputation for its healthful climate, and that such things as "the fever" were unknown to the village inhabitants. This fact made it all the more terrible and difficult for Dad's mind to comprehend. He, in com-

mon with the rest of the village people, knew nothing about fever epidemics except what they read through the very much embellished accounts of the daily papers from the city. The village folks had long ago instinctively decided that the fever scourge was for the cities alone; that their little village stowed away among the Maryland hills, with its pure air and water, was safe from such calamities. Dad had told John of this feeling of safety in the village as he had told many another person who was visiting Hilldale, and John had felt more than once that the statement was true. Fever scourges must be confined to large cities, with their impure water, bad sanitation, and lack of hygiene in the poorer districts of those cities. John had seen enough in his college settlement work to strengthen the idea that disease and the filth of the slums travel hand in hand. But John would not allow himself to be blinded under the present circumstances, and he resolved to face the situation in the best way that he knew. If he had hitherto felt that disease epidemics were native to the city slums, he also realized that all the filth, disease-bearing germs, and lack of sanitation that were necessary for the slum dis-

eases, were deliberately carried by those wretched gypsies and deposited there above the village. What might be the result? Nay, what must be the result? he thought.

Poor old Johnson could not reason with so calm, so philosophical a mind as John did. He knew nothing about the relation between disease and bad sanitation; all that he could now feel was that some dreadful calamity was about to fall upon the village, the pride of his younger days, the pride of his now advancing age. He could not appreciate the many events that must take place before his old hack would be used as a carrier of the dead instead of the living; all that he could possibly see was his old hack bearing the dead, followed by the weeping and the sorrowing,—if John's words were true, and John had described the camp so vividly, had explained so clearly the nature of "the fever," that the poor man already began to feel the pang, the sting of death.

"My boy, lad John, when will all this fall upon our willage? Must old Dad live to see the day when weepin' and sorrowin' shall fall upon that dear old willage that has lived so comfortable-like fur many, many years among

the hills of our Maryland; that has nestled among those hills so trustin' like as a lot of little chicks gathers around the old hen? No, no, John, it cannot be true; say that it won't be true, say John lad, that you do be jokin'. But no, you have become too good a friend to the willage folks to joke with its life and death. Tell me, lad, when will the hand of death fall upon our willage?"

Dad forgot the heat in the intense concern that he felt for the village, and in John he was beginning to feel that he saw a prophet, indeed, who could foretell the future of the village.

"Johnson, old fellow, I fear that it has begun already; the minister has been complaining for the last several days, and unless I am very much mistaken, the fever has attacked its first victim, and I feel that I am not mistaken. In my work among the poor people of the city slums I have seen enough to warrant me in taking the course I intend to take; we dare not let the fever get ahead of us, if we can possibly prevent it. The village at present is in a very bad way for doctors and nurses, and here it is, Dad, where you and I must stick together and not rest until all is done that can be done for those

who shall be stricken with the fever. Doctor Lambdon is away, on the ocean by this time, I suppose; we cannot count upon him; old Arnold, poor old man, is worn out, and his help will be worth very little. If I am right in my belief—would to God that I were wrong!—we shall need a doctor and nurses, especially nurses. And, Dad Johnson, I am going to count on you for one of those nurses; can I depend on you?"

"Can you depend on old Dad? Lad, lad, the willage folks would not need to ask that question of Dad Johnson. I hain't no family and children of my own, and I therefore counts the whole willage as my family; lad, as a lovin' father would nurse his sick child, so will I keer fur the willage folks. Count on Dad."

By this time the hack had reached the station; the train had just arrived. No passengers came with the train; only the half-empty mail bag was thrown off for Dad on his return journey.

"Wait, Dad, for a moment, and I shall be with you," called out John as he hurried into the telegraph office where the slow tick, tick, tick of the telegraph keys, as monotonous a

sound as the lazy humming of the bumble-bee which was flying around the room, had almost put the telegraph operator to sleep.

"Will you please send this message for me at once?" said John as he handed a paper to the operator.

The operator took the message and read:

"To Dr. James H. Rutherling:—

"Come on next train to above address; shall meet you at station; don't fail; need your advice. John Montcalm."

CHAPTER XI.

ON that same evening, while Mary and her mother were in the kitchen, John Montcalm was enjoying the coolness, what coolness there was, of the old oak tree. Ralph Whittleby had just appeared at the kitchen door, and looking in the direction of the oak tree he noticed John; at once Ralph turned his head in an opposite direction. John was lying under the oak tree, stretched at his full length, his head supported on his hands; he was looking up into the branches of the oak. As Ralph appeared at the door, John had turned his head at a small angle, and, though Ralph was not aware of it, he had seen him turn his head from the tree to an opposite direction. John arose to his feet and called out, "Ralph, may I see you here under the oak for a moment?"

"I am sorry, John, but I must go up to my room at once and dress for the evening; have an engagement with Miss Mason. Sorry, John, but I suppose you can wait until the morning,

can you not?" Ralph did not wait for an answer, but he turned back into the kitchen, and in a few moments John saw him in his room. John, looking away from the window of Ralph's room, resumed his comfortable attitude under the oak, and, his head on his hands, he was soon again studying the leaves of the old oak.

"Yes, I can wait until to-morrow, Ralph, but who can tell what the next twelve hours may bring forth? Ralph seems to have no time for any one or anything but Marguerite Mason, and the girl on her part seems to be much infatuated with him. I cannot understand him fully. I have learned to know Ralph better in the short time I have been here than during my whole college course; what at college I took for a certain reserve of character in Ralph I find here to be changed to moroseness; toleration of opinion there has here become intoleration; words of praise for parents, sister and brother heard there are here not heard at all; respect for father has here become reverence mingled largely with awe. I cannot understand the change, if there is a change; to me he seems cold and distant, and it is only after much effort that I can get him to converse at all. But

the change may be in me, so I will say nothing; but as old Dad would say, I must at times 'do a heap of thinkin'.' Poor old Dad, how he loves this little village! If I could only forget that camp scene! But there, again, is the selfish element of mortal me creeping out; had I not seen the camp and those three graves, truly my mind would be more at ease, but, then, is it not better to have seen it, that we should begin to prepare for the worst! I fear for the village with its inadequate help and protection. A fire would not spread more rapidly and with more terrible results with a bucket brigade as its only opponent than the fever with poor old Arnold as its only fighting force. Oh, if I could only hope that I am mistaken and that all shall go well with the village. I feel as if I had done a day's hard work, and how refreshing and comforting are your branches, dear old oak; how the village folks must love you! Already you have become to me a steadfast friend; I, indeed, old oak, was going to say my best friend in the village, but to you I will confide that there is one better; if she could only feel as I do! Mary! But I fear we must think of something else besides love for some time to come; in the mean-

time hope shall give me strength to do the work that is before me."

John was talking, whispering almost to the oak tree. The slight swaying of the branches of the tree were beginning to have a soothing effect upon John as he lay looking up into its branches; tired out after the day's work, physical and mental, he was soon sound asleep. For the time being, then, John forgot the fever, Ralph, and even Mary.

The sun was setting with a red glow on the western horizon as Mary came out of the house, neatly dressed for the evening. Walking over to the oak with a book in her hand, she saw John asleep under the tree. At first she started to walk back, but turning towards the tree again she felt that John was sleeping so soundly that she could easily take a seat under the tree without awaking him. She sat and read until it became too dark for further reading. John remained asleep. Who could, indeed, who would reveal Mary's thoughts as she sat there near John? The tree might, but long ago, as far back as Mary could remember, she had made a confidant of the tree; even as a little child Mary would carry her thoughts, her troubles to the

old oak tree, and there at its roots pour her childish sorrows until the tree must think, if the oak could think, that the little thing's heart would break. It was, indeed, her oak tree, her Oak. But Ralph grew, and the tree was then claimed by him; only in secret could the child Mary worship at her old shrine. On this particular evening Ralph had gone out, and to Mary the dear old oak never seemed so friendly; a leaf would occasionally fall, and each leaf that fell was a message to Mary. Never before did the tree seem so much to belong to her; it was again her Oak. Mary was happy; and why? Should she have asked herself the same question, probably even she could not have answered it.

A long time passed before John began to move; when he opened his eyes he saw Mary seated at a little distance from himself, the book having fallen to her feet.

"Ah, Miss Whittleby, when I awakened, I thought I saw an angel standing guard over me, and now I am sure that an angel did guard me while I was sleeping."

"Yes, our dear old oak tree surely is an angel," answered Mary.

"And, of course, Miss Whittleby, you know that this is the angel I mean. Girls are so very stupid, when they choose to be."

"You seem to know the weaknesses of the sex."

"We shall not discuss the weaknesses of the fair sex," said John, rising and taking a seat near Mary, "at least not at this particular time when her weaknesses are so utterly buried by her good qualities. Why, it is growing quite dark; how long have I been sleeping?"

"You seemed to be enjoying your sleep so thoroughly, and I felt that you were in such need of it after running around all day that I had not the heart to disturb you. Yes, it is getting a little late, but I think I could have stood guard all night without disturbing you; now, don't you think that I would make a good watch-dog?"

"Or guardian angel, which?" asked John.

"I suppose it is in order to let that question unanswered; before it became too dark, I was reading your book, and was much interested. I see, I am indeed forced to see that your ideas and beliefs as expressed last evening are very plausible. And, what is more important, even,

I must feel that they are satisfying, and therefore comforting. Should the religion of Christ be changed from a hard, cold religion of doctrine and dogma to a religion of love and good works, what a wonderful change we would see in all phases of life and society!"

"Yes, the so-called social problem would sink into insignificance," answered John.

"The book is very good, indeed, and I am enjoying it thoroughly; it cannot help but have a strong influence."

"I am a little surprised, Miss Whittleby, and not a little pleased that you see the force of the book; as I said before, if you will pardon my candor, you are far from hopeless, and you are becoming less hopeless each day. But please excuse me for changing the subject, though I should like to continue our discussion of last evening; but I have another matter which I must mention to you, Miss Whittleby, though it pains me very much to do so. I at first did not intend speaking to you until my fears should be confirmed; but I feel that you are a girl with so much good, practical sense and strength that I shall confide in you."

"Why, Mr. Montcalm, what dreadful thing has happened or is going to happen? I felt today that something was wrong when you were absent from the house for so long a time, both morning and afternoon; but this evening under the dear old oak my fears were scattered; I now see, however, that I am right. What is the matter?"

"You remember our ride last evening, and our experience at the gypsy camp? You remember the three newly-made graves? Grim death had removed over a fourth of the camp, and now, Miss Whittleby, that camp hangs over the village as the sword hung over Damocles; nay, even worse, for I feel that the hair that held the sword has broken and that the damage is done."

"Mr. Montcalm, who do you mean? Oh, horrible! You can't mean that what has happened to the gypsy camp may likewise happen to our village. I see, I see; this accounts for your absence today, for your interest in father's condition. Or am I wrong, do I misunderstand you?" Mary Whittleby was a girl filled with good, wholesome sense, and, though she sus-

pected to what John referred, yet she remained calm and undemonstrative.

John then told Mary what he had found at the camp, and the only conclusion that he could draw. He told Mary of his telegram to Dr. Rutherling, and outlined his plans to her. Mary could not at first realize the state of affairs that was so suddenly thrust upon her, but at once she wanted to know what she could do.

"Miss Whittleby, I do not doubt that your father is the first one of many who shall be stricken with the fever. Of course, this is merely an unprofessional opinion, and my hope is that my fears have painted the situation too black. But until Dr. Rutherling, an old medical friend of our family, who has seen and handled many fever epidemics, comes, we shall do nothing at all. I expect him on the first train in the morning, and he will then tell us what to do. Until then, let nothing be said to anyone; I confided in our old friend Dad, for I needed his help, but I also told him not to tell anyone else. This evening the poor old fellow is at the scene of the camp, and, at my request, is thoroughly cleansing the place. That, I be-

lieve, is all that we can do until Dr. Rutherling comes."

"But, Mr. Montcalm," asked Mary in an anxious tone, "why all this secrecy? Would it not be better that the village folks be informed, that they may take the proper precautions?"

"No," answered John, "the sudden knowledge of the danger that is hanging over the village may throw the whole village into a panic, and the fear thus arising may even add to the danger; fear, you know, has killed thousands of victims by debilitating them first and thus furnishing a favorable soil for the growth of disease germs, and furnishing at the same time a weakened resistance. No, Miss Whittleby, I fear that the village folks shall find it out only too soon, and I doubt not there are many to-night, even as your father is, their poor lips parched, and their thirst almost unquenchable. I have seen too much of it in my little experience in slum work not to know the probable feelings of some of your poor village people at this very moment.

A thought suddenly struck John, and he grew cold and warm alternately. Mary, might she not also be in danger? Would to God that

the night were over and that Rutherling would be in the village! Suppose the telegram were miscarried, or that Rutherling would fail him! No, no, he dare not; he would not.

At the same time that Mary and John were discussing the situation under the oak tree, old Dad Johnson was working at the scene of the gypsy camp. The odors arising from the camp at times almost sickened the old man, and, with his lantern in his hand, he would walk out to the road for fresh air and a moment's rest from his sickening work. He finished his work, as ordered by John, and, almost dazed with fear for the village and its people, he picked up the lantern and walked around the camp, that he might be sure that his work was done thoroughly. In his walk he stumbled over a mound, and his lantern fell from his hand; as it fell and rolled away, he saw three newly-made graves, the three mounds the lad John had mentioned. He reached for his light; the light was flickering, and, as he raised the lantern, the light was extinguished. The trees around the camp were thick, and the darkness therefore intense. Dad tried to relight his lantern, but the darkness and his trembling hands made it almost impossible;

but he finally succeeded, though the light lasted only a short time. In its fall, the cap fell off the lantern top, long ago worn out and of no use, and the oil was spilled on the ground. Again the light began to flicker, burning gradually lower and lower.

"Just that way, mebby, the light of some of the poor willage folks will go out," said Dad to himself, as again he was in total darkness. The poor old fellow stumbled around in the dark for a long time, not being able at once to locate the way out to the road. To a person with less superstitious ideas than were native with old Dad, the shadows of trees in the fiickering of the lantern before it was extinguished might easily have assumed the shape of the spirits of the dead gypsies coming back to look for the living. But good old Dad, his work now completed, had no concern for the dead; all his thoughts were with the living down there in the village.

When Dad reached the village, silence reigned everywhere; only an occasional light, here and there, could be seen,—probably some little one with dry tongue, eagerly gulping the cold water from the glass held by a loving, careful mother.

The lights had no significance for old Dad.

CHAPTER XII.

"A CLEANER village cannot be found in all Maryland, and for that matter, Montcalm, we would be compelled to travel through many states before we could find a town that would excel for cleanliness this model Maryland village. But for that set of damned, scoundrelly gypsies, my services would not be needed here at all; I could take the next train back for home, where I really should be at this moment. But, Montcalm, I shall be needed here for a while, and that most damned bad, too." The speaker was Dr. James H. Rutherling, a man of middle age, plain-spoken, and to all appearance brusque in manner. He was the Montcalm family physician, and John had learned to love him; he forgot Rutherling's rough manner of speech, for he had learned to know that the doctor had a heart full of spmpathy for his fellow creatures. John loved him in spite of his roughness, and at this particular time he was for John an object almost of wor-

ship. Before Rutherling came to the village, John did not feel himself equal to the responsibilities that were being thrust upon him, by, as he thought, an unkind fate. He could think only of the terrible results that a fever epidemic might carry with it, realizing that she, who was growing more dear to him every day, might also fall a victim to the dread scourge. John felt much relieved when he caught first sight of Rutherling at the railway station.

A day had passed since Dr. Rutherling arrived in Hilldale. The village folks were not yet informed of the danger that threatened them, and when gossip carried the news that a city doctor of much ability was visiting the village, nothing was thought except that a busy doctor had stolen a little deserved rest from a busy city practice. Not long after his arrival in Hilldale, John had Dr. Rutherling visit Mr. Whittleby; again gossip began its work, and the news spread that John Montcalm had sent for the city doctor to attend Mr. Whittleby.

"I wonder if our Dr. Arnold is not good enough to take care of the minister; only a little cold, anyhow; if the minister would go out more and see his people, as he should, maybe he

wouldn't be sick; so there!"—Yes, so there, and thus the tongues wagged.

When Dr. Rutherling pronounced the sickness of the minister to be typhoid fever, then tongues wagged faster than ever. It was soon reported that the city doctor said that the minister was dying, and that in a few days the whole minister's family would be in bed with the fever. Indeed, the report of gossip had grown so rapidly that it was said the city doctor himself had told it that he had visited a dozen houses and had found fever in every one of them.

John Montcalm and Dr. Rutherling, having waited for the cool of the evening, had just returned from a quiet, yet thorough inspection of the village, its front and back streets, and all the alleys. The doctor had found, as he had expressed it, the village a veritable model of cleanliness, and at first doubted that there could be basis for John's fears.

"Had you not told me the condition of that hell-hole up there on the hill, I would feel like trouncing you soundly, Montcalm, for summoning me to this forsaken village, lost among these hills. But you are right; great danger threatens the village, and we must prepare for it."

As the two men were talking on the front porch of the parsonage, Dad Johnson passed the house, on the other side of the street; he stopped and called John to cross the street, as he wanted to speak to him.

"Come over here, Dad, I want you to meet my friend, Dr. Rutherling."

"John, my lad, I'd like to come over, fur I don't fear fur myself, but I dassent come, I dassent."

Dad's voice trembled as he spoke, and the jovial expression so common to his face was so much changed that John hardly knew him.

"Why, Dad, what is the matter? Why daren't you come to the parsonage?" asked John as he crossed the street to talk to the old man.

"Well, my lad, the people do be talkin'; they say as how the minister is dyin' and that the others of the family are down with the fever the same as the minister himself, and that they think it must be terrible ketchin', or why did the rest of the minister's family git it? they say."

"Now, Dad, you may tell those old loungers that the minister is the only one that is sick,

that the rest of the family are as well as they are."

"I did tell them, lad, but they sorter hinted, when I said as how I am comin' to the minister's home to see for myself, that they wouldn't ride in my hack, and they said that they would even go to the station and tell the people what come that my hack is full of the fever. And, lad, Ed Ganton, that infernal old loafer, said fur me to find out what the city doctor is here fur, anyway; if Ganton would be treatin' his woman half decent like, he wouldn't have no time to mind other people's bizness."

"Well, Dad," replied John, "you may tell the people how it is at the minister's house, and also tell them that in a very short time, in all probability, the doctor from the city will have something to say to them. Good-bye, good old fellow, and, Dad, keep the hack running, except the tongue."

Dad gave a nod of understanding approval and walked down the street again. John joined Rutherling and they continued their conversation.

"I suppose, Montcalm, that you recognize that we are up against a pretty stiff proposition,

if our fears are realized. To-morrow morning we shall visit the homes and see just what hold the fever has taken on the village people. Probably the minister's case is an isolated one. But then we can't forget that *deuc*'ed camp above the village. You took the proper precaution, at any rate, Montcalm;" and Rutherling puffed away at his cigar as if each puff were a western cyclone to blow the camp and its gypsies far out into the sea; "but," the doctor continued, "there may be heavy work for us to do, and I am *deuc*'ed tired, so I shall go back to the inn; I was lucky to get a room there. Have telegraphed home that I shall not be back for a a few days. Good-bye; will see you early in the morning."

"Good-bye, and make it as early as you want to, and have your plans ready; remember, at your word, up go my sleeves."

John walked back into the yard, where he found Mary, Marguerite Mason and Ralph seated under the oak tree.

"What is the latest, Mr. Montcalm," anxiously asked Mary, who had seen Dr. Rutherling walk away from the parsonage, and whom he was keeping informed with his plans.

The next day was a memorable one in the annals of the village history. Rumors were now flying thick and fast, and the usually quiet village was growing much excited. Some of the Hilldale people discredited the rumors entirely, not believing it possible that such a fate could befall their beloved village; others believed, and believing they added to the now rapidly circulating reports, and sent them flying with ever increasing rapidity. Small-pox, the black plague, yellow fever, each had its turn, and their names were flying up and down the village streets as though the diseases themselves lurked behind every closed door. A house with its shutters closed and blinds drawn was a marked house that day, and even though the sun seemed to be shining with greater heat than on the previous day, yet the little houses were opened; shutters were opened with a bang, and doors were thrown wide open to show the village that in those houses at least there was hidden no disease. A house here, a house there, remained as on other hot days; the shutters were closed, and the blinds drawn.

Late in the afternoon Dr. Rutherling received a message, signed by a few of the leading

village men, some merchants, some butchers; Charlie, the ice-cream man, ended the list of names. They wanted to know the object of his visit and the condition of the minister. A little fellow, with bare feet, a half worn hat of straw, and an old carpet rag for suspenders, brought the message. Dr. Rutherling opened the message and read it; he looked over his glasses at the bare-foot boy and scowled.

"Want to know my business, do they, eh? Is your town only for Marylanders, young man?" Rutherling accompanied his question with another scowl that made the little fellow jump; picking up his straw hat, he almost whispered: "I—I—I—I d—d—don't know, sir, but they says as is there an anwser?"

"Is there an answer? Whose business is it what my business is here? Say, say, whose business is it?"

"I—I—I d—d—d—don't know, sir; but the answer?"

"Yes, there is an answer,—" the boy had his one eye on the doctor's right foot, as though he expected the answer to come from that direction—"and if your memory is as good as the nerve of those men who wrote this paper is great,

then carry this message to them, and carry it at once. Tell them, tell everybody that the doctor from the city, and friend of John Montcalm, wishes to speak to them at the town hall this evening. Or, wait; I shall write it down, for I am afraid you might forget it;" the doctor took out a prescription blank and wrote:

> "To whom it may concern:—
>
> "Dr. James H. Rutherling will speak to a mass-meeting of the village folks this evening immediately after supper at the town hall. He wishes a full meeting, especially of the business men and summer boarders."

"There, my young bare-foot, take that paper back to the men who sent you here and tell them to tack it up in the post-office, where all can see it; now run!" The boy needed no second command, and after receiving the paper he darted down the street.

"Want to know my business, do they? Well, I call that *deuc*'ed impertinence; but, I won't blame them, poor stupid souls, that they are; such reports as have been circulating would frighten any person. And then, too, these men in this backwood town are only human; they love their families and their vil-

lage." Dr. Rutherling walked back to his room, thus talking to himself.

The town hall was crowded, many standing on the outside unable to gain admittance. The hall was a plain wooden structure, used for church fairs, festivals, and amateur performances of various kinds. A little stage elevated, and the very plain, box like body of the hall with its straight back benches,—that fully describes the town hall of Hilldale; indeed, the only thing that seemed to Rutherling to at all favor the hall was its many windows, which on this evening were open to catch whatever breeze there might be. At the same time many of those who could not enter the room were now looking in through the windows. The large crowd was quiet, unusually quiet for a village crowd; many faces wore an anxious look. They did not have a long time to wait, for Rutherling and Montcalm were now entering the hall. The low talking was reduced to subdued whispering, and as Rutherling mounted the stage, he at once had the undivided attention of the large crowd of village people, of the anxious and the curious, for both were represented among the faces that were now turned towards Rutherling.

"People of the village, I am no speech maker, and I have no speech to make this evening," Rutherling began after John had presented him to the people with a few words of introduction; "what I have to say I shall say to the point, briefly. Mr. Montcalm, known to you all, and whom you all respect, a few days ago discovered a camp of gypsies situated directly above your village. Three of the gypsies died of typhoid fever. A study of the drainage of this land leads us to believe that there is danger of its spreading among the village people. One of your number, as you have rightly suspected, is already sick, and on a tour of inspection this morning we found at least twenty cases with beginning symptoms. With splendid foresight, Mr. Montcalm—you may call him John—has taken proper precautions at the outset. With your aid, my friends of the village, we hope to make the epidemic as light as possible, and if it is any encouragement for you to know it, I may say that with proper treatment and nursing the results are extremely satisfactory. But, let me add, and this I add with great emphasis, the results are satisfactory only with good, hard work, day and night, with work straight from the

shoulder. We shall need those who are willing to nurse the unfortunate ones, and we shall, therefore, soon ask for volunteers. After much persuasion, and for this you must thank our friend John, I have decided to spend my summer vacation right here with you. Montcalm shall be my first assistant; Dad Johnson, so well known to you all, is another valuable volunteer. I have found a few willing volunteers among the boarders. We have secured the hall as a temporary hospital, and in the morning those who need our care will be brought here, as many as are willing to come; the room will be cleaned and made comfortable; with comfortable cots and proper treatment the sick ones will be more comfortable here than they could possibly be at their homes. But I have said enough; you all know where I can be found. Names of volunteers may be handed to Dr. Arnold, John Montcalm, or myself. Before closing I want to add one word more, and I have reserved this for the last, because it is the most important message that it is possible for me to give you. As a proper precaution against the fever it is absolutely necessary that you clean thoroughly your homes and yards, front and

back; that you keep yourselves clean, and, now mark this,—that you boil all the water you use; let me repeat,—boil all your water. With these precautions you can rest assured that the fever shall not get ahead of us, but we will get ahead of the fever."

CHAPTER XIII.

ONE night only was necessary to transform the little town hall into a temporary hospital, and when the village awoke the following morning it looked upon a room which was hard to recognize as the same one that held a large crowd of suffocating, perspiring, anxious persons on the previous evening. The hall was now merely a large, empty box; the benches were removed; all the decorations, all unnecessary articles were taken from the hall, which now presented a bare, barren appearance. The windows were opened, and the morning air was reaching every crack and crevice, and of cracks and crevices there were many. But Rutherling cared not for the number of cracks in the walls, nor how large they were. What he wanted was a large, airy room, and the hall, therefore, suited his purpose. The scrub-brushes and disinfectants completed the transformation of the village hall from a place of public gatherings to one of shelter and comfort for the fever-stricken

patients. Twenty cots had been gathered from various families of the village, and they were now immaculately clean with freshly laundried bed clothes; the cots were now almost the sole furniture of the hall, ten of each on either side of the building, arranged along the walls. Johnson was visited early in the morning by Dr. Rutherling and John; Dad had just returned from the first trip to the station; his hack was empty. The old man had his eyes on the ground as Rutherling and John approached, and, therefore, did not see them until John spoke.

"Hello, hello, Dad; wake up, wake up; it's too early in the morning for you to be standing here dreaming on your feet!" John tapped the old man on the shoulder as he spoke.

"Yes, lad, it is late to be sleepin'; you be right. But now two days already has passed, and those old bumbly-bees are my only passengers. And, see, read for yourself, why it is that I can't do better than carry flies and bumbly-bees." Dad handed John a copy of the morning paper which he brought along from the station. John took the paper and read aloud the article to which Dad had pointed:

'A fever-stricken village! Half of Hilldale's population stricken with the fever! The boarders are fleeing panic-stricken, and the boarding houses are deserted. The little village is located among the hills of Maryland, and has always been regarded as a healthful summer resort; the fever is supposed to have had its origin from the camp of a band of gypsies whose members were totally annihilated by the fever scourge. The local doctors are overworked, and the number of deaths is appalling. It is feared by the populace that the fever has only begun its deadly work. The leading minister of the ill-fated village was stricken in his pulpit, and it is feared that he will not survive the day. The town hall is changed from a scene of gayety to one of death and sorrow. A leading doctor, Dr. James H.—"

"What *deuc*'ed reporter has made an ass of himself? Half of the village stricken, scene of death, the minister stricken in his pulpit, local doctors overworked!—what *deuc*'ed rot is that? I would like to have that reporter here, and make him chew his own words. Has Maryland never had a case of typhoid fever?" asked Dr. Rutherling as he crumpled up the paper and

threw it on the ground, tramping it under his foot; he was wishing that the particular newspaper reporter who wrote that article with its double heading was at the same place.

"Yes, Doc, it may be all rot, but how will that help my hack? Two days now, and no passengers but bumbly-bees. But it might be worser; I still have the mail bag, and Uncle Sam will not stop that for the fever; we must be thankful for that." The mail bag and its small remuneration were the silver lining to Dad's cloud which was hourly growing darker and larger.

"Well, Johnson, don't worry that your old hack is not appreciated these days."

"Don't worry, Doc! I suppose it won't do no good to worry, but when I'se made to ride to and fro the station with no one, sir, it is purty lonesome-like. And then if the boarders should leave, well, then it won't be so very lonesome down to the station, but what will the poor willage do without summer boarders? Who will come to the willage after reading that newspaper article, I'd like to know?" Old Johnson was much depressed, and crestfallen over the possible loss to himself and the village, which

he would now attribute not so much to the fever itself as to the article in the newspaper, which was now under Rutherling's foot. "Look here, Dad," said John, "cheer up; you know that much that is in that newspaper is false; it is bad enough, it is true, but you, my friend, Dad, are not the man to cross a bridge before you come to it. Remember, we depend much on Dad Johnson these days; so, Dad, let your face break up into smiles again. There, that is more becoming than the cloud that was on your face when the doctor and I walked up. And, Dad, don't fear that you will get lonesome these days, for we have enough to keep you busy; and if you have no passengers, so much the better. The doctor and I have come to you here to give you your first work, and your good old hack which has done service for such a long time has more important work to do than it has ever done before. Yes, Dad, to carry the sick to the town hall nothing is so well suited as your hack, and as Dr. Rutherling and I were walking to see you, we were saying that we were very fortunate in having your hack and you as a driver. If the passenger service has gone to pieces for a few weeks, so much the better; we can then have

the hack solely for this purpose. A carriage can be used for the mail and any stray passenger. Now, Dad, can we have the hack?"

"Can you have the hack, lad, John? Yes, and you be right welcome to it, too. You may have the hack, but old Dad will still be on the driver's seat." Dad seemed pleased when John praised the hack; and when he found that it could now be put into service for the sake of his fellow-village folks, then he forgot all about the loss to himself of his passenger trade. He said that he would be at their service immediately, and that he would never be absent when needed; he told John that he would secure his young nephew to carry the mail on horseback.

"Well, Dad," John replied, "then scrub your hack thoroughly; make it neat and clean, and meet the doctor and me as soon as possible at the inn, and be there with the hack."

"You won't have long to wait, lad, and Dad will scrub his knuckles open to the bone to have the hack spick-span clean. When I meet you and Doc at the inn, I shall be drivin' a regular ambylence." Dad spoke as though he were quite proud of the dignity that should thus be

thrust upon his dear old hack and upon himself as hack-driver, soon to become ambulance driver.

When Dr. Rutherling and John reached the doctor's room at the inn, they found a number of messages, which Dr. Rutherling hastily opened and read. "Hello, this is fortunate, John; here is a young medical student who volunteers his services in nursing the sick. Here is another, a young girl, whose ambition shall now be gratified. She has always wished to learn nursing, she says, but her parents objected; she now also volunteers her services. A few others have also volunteered, and I suppose we may as well sit down for a few moments and choose our help. Of one thing I am *deuc*'edly thankful,—the boarders are keeping their heads; I suppose they know the meaning of fever epidemics, that with proper care the infection can be satisfactorily held within bounds. Then, you know, John, many of our city chaps don't drink water, anyway."

The doctor took up another message and read,—"My dear, good, noble Doctor Rutherling—" the doctor hemmed a little, and then kept reading, "my heart almost bursts with sympathy for the sufferers of the village; I offer

you my services to stand guard over the bed of an afflicted one, if the good Lord preserves this throbbing heart. Signed,

PHOEBE TOMPKINS."

"Well, Phoebe, we don't need any one to stand guard, what we want is workers, so we shall throw your name out. Hope your throbbing heart will not burst. John, the messages of the medical student and of our ambitious nurse have the right ring, so put down their names."

"Doctor, I also have a name, and I am sure we shall not be disappointed in this name. I shall write down with your permission the name of Miss Mary Whittleby."

"Well, suppose you write down the name of Mary Whittleby for day duty and that of John Montcalm for night duty; but never mind, my boy, we shall arrange that later."

John flushed as the doctor spoke; the doctor understood the flush, and he knew he would have two assistants whom he could thoroughly trust. The doctor read over the messages, and John wrote down the names; they did not choose an army of nurses, as the doctor said that a few faithful, competent ones would be all

he wished. As he finished reading the messages, there was a tap at the door, and another paper was handed to the doctor; as he read, John saw that there was new cause for alarm and worry.

"Twenty beds; well, this will fill eighteen; here, John, is a request that we visit a family, as three of the children are ailing, says the mother. Am afraid that the number of beds must be increased, and we may as well begin to look for a further supply of cots. Best to prepare for the worst."

"By the way, doctor, I have another patient to add to the list, that of the minister."

"What, bring the minister to the hall? Why can't his son and daughter nurse him at home?"

"The minister, when informed of his condition and of our plans, took a very common sense view of the matter, and it is his preference to be treated together with the rest. His daughter says she is capable of caring for more than one patient, and therefore prefers to have her duties changed from the parsonage to the hall. The son,—Ralph Whittleby,—well, doctor, I am almost ashamed to tell you. A certain girl, a particular friend of his, left early yesterday

morning for a house party at the house of a friend of hers, the girl, I am sure, being unaware of the condition of the village."

"Unaware, did you say?" scowled out the doctor.

"Yes, I think that she has not heard any of the rumors that have been circulated. She lives out of town, and the only news that reaches her ears these days goes through Ralph Whittleby; I am sure he has told the girl that his father is suffering from a cold or some other slight ailment. Going yesterday morning, she knew nothing about the meeting that was held in the hall in the evening."

"But Ralph Whittleby, what of him?" asked the doctor.

"The son, doctor, has followed the girl; he left early this morning," John almost feared to tell the doctor, and was not surprised at the doctor's outburst.

"The *deuc*'ed scoundrel! What, would he leave home and village when he is needed so badly both by his own family and the village people! The ungrateful wretch." The doctor emphasized this statement with a stamp of his foot that shook the room.

"He had promised Miss Mason to accompany her to the house party; could he break his promise?"

"None of that *deuc*'ed nonsense, John; break his promise?"

"Those words are his, doctor, not mine; I am sure that I also lost patience with Ralph Whittleby when I learned that he would leave his post when most needed. Shall we send for him?"

"Send for him? No, no; let him go, and let him stay, if he wishes. He would probably be in the way anyway,—blast him; I wonder if he doesn't fear the fever. Probably he wishes to spare himself from a possible infection. Well, we can take care of the father in the hall. That girl is worth a thousand such boys, as her rascally, cowardly brother. They say around here that the son of the minister is a hard church worker, having inherited that trait from his father, as well as his father's opinions. Well, I hope the father shall live to repent of the training he has given his ungrateful son. I have no patience, John, with such people; they belong to that class of mankind which for a pretense makes long prayers, but when they

are needed for real work, then they must keep previous engagements, daren't break promises. But we can get along without him. And for one reason in particular I am glad that the minister wishes to be treated in the town hall; the other people will also enter it with more confidence if they know that the minister is there. I wonder—come in, come in," called out the doctor, as a rap on the door interrupted him. The door opened, and Dad Johnson walked in.

"Hello, Johnson, I was just wondering at what time you would be around with your ambulance. Ah, I see that you are pleased,—your ambulance. John, go down and inspect the hack,—I beg your pardon, Johnson, I mean the ambulance."

"Well, Doc, I hurried all I could, sir; it ain't quite dry yet, but I garranty that it is clean, every inch of it; come, look for yourself."

The three men inspected the hack, and John, with a list of names in his hand, jumped up to the driver's seat; Dad got up beside him, saying that he was now ready to go to work.

The day had finally passed, and the sun was once more losing its force as it began to sink slowly beneath the hills to the west of the vil-

lage. That afternoon had been one of excitement for the village, as the hack was driven here and there on its errands of mercy. Business was almost suspended, those stores only being busy from which were taken articles that were needed at the hall, such as bed clothes.

"Eighteen beds, nineteen," Dr. Rutherling counted as the minister was finally placed in his bed, the last bed to the right of the hall, the bed nearest the stage. More beds, he said, would be needed, but enough was done for one day, and after a good night's rest—Montcalm should be in charge of the hall the first night!—the work of treating the fever patients would be started in earnest the next day; thus thought the good doctor as he walked up and down the space between the beds. He felt proud of his day's work; was almost thankful that this opportunity had come to him thus to care for, and possibly save, fever patients by the wholesale. To the doctor it was a familiar, not a strange sight, this room full of patients; and to him it was also not a particularly unpleasant sight. But the village could not look at the hall and its strange occupants through the doctor's eyes. As John drove around the village for the different fever patients,

he saw scenes, and heard sounds which he would carry with him down through his life of strong manhood to his old days. The hall, the town hall, remembered by the village folks only for its occasions of pleasure and profit, was now transformed to a hospital! The word hospital flew through the village, and added to the fears of the people. Their idea of a hospital was as crude as Hilldale itself was remote; many a mother was at first unwilling to yield her sick boy to the uncertain treatment of the "hospital."

That evening, the first evening of the hospital's existence, was a strange one for the village. People all over the village spoke in whispers; "loud talking was not respectful to the sick," said an old lady. Some feared almost to go to bed lest they should awaken in the morning with the fever, the early symptoms of which they had now learned, and many learned them only to fear them. Did they clean their yards, front and back? Did they boil their water? The doctor himself could not have fulfilled his own requests more fully, and even to this day many a one of the village would confidently expect an attack of the fever should they drink unboiled water.

The day was done, and the hall was quiet, only for an occasional moan here and there, or a request for water. Dr. Rutherling had just given John his orders for the night; temperatures were to be taken; patients were to be sponged; parched lips and dry, leathery tongues to be cooled with cracked ice; for medicines they could wait until the morning, and the doctor, bidding John a "Good night," walked to his room at the inn.

"A good night!" said John to himself; "with the control of nineteen fever patients I surely ought to have a good night? If I could but have her company and her encouraging words, surely then the night would be good. It is growing quite dark, and she is probably enjoying the coolness of the old oak at this moment."

"Mr. Montcalm," said a low voice at John's shoulder as he turned to go into the hall; "Mr. Montcalm, will you not accept my help this night? The night will be long, and you may need help."

"Well, little girl, I have just been slandering you, and I must now apologize. I have just accused you of enjoying even at this very mo-

ment the coolness of our dear old oak; but here you are willing, wishing to breathe the heated air of the fever patients. But, no, Miss Whittleby, your time for helping has not yet come; we may need you later on, but not yet. If I could but have your company, work here would be a pleasure. Ah, Miss Whittleby, Mary, the time may come—"

"Water, O please, mister, a drink of water," interrupted a voice at the far end of the hall.

Was that a tear that John saw roll down Mary's cheek as she gave him good night? He was not sure; it was growing dark.

He walked into the hall; his vigil for the night had begun.

CHAPTER XIV.

SNUGLY stowed away among the Appalachian hills of Maryland was a large farm of many acres; in the midst of the farm land, situated high upon a hill, surrounded by a shady grove, was the farm house. It stood there at the top of the hill as a guardian of all the acres of land within its view,—a stately, colonial mansion.

The stately rooms were now filled with songs and laughter, the echoes of which were carried down to the tenant of the farm and his laborers in the field; these laborers, colored, had not much time for songs and laughter, but when evening would come, tired and work-worn, they would retire to their little huts which were built for them. The farmer was a Southern gentleman, who had carried his aristocracy and the remnant of all his wealth into Maryland at the close of the war; he was followed by his faithful slaves, who were, though now free and independent as declared by the laws of the land, still happy to serve their "Massa." As had often

been expressed by "Uncle Abe," the farmer's first overseer, "the massa was good befo' the wa', he is good afta de wa'; he keeps us, we stays, dat is all;" and that was all. They —"common sense niggers," the farmer would say—"preferred the certainties of the Maryland farm to the uncertainties which freedom had suddenly thrust upon them, unprepared as they were for it." So they loved their master, and the huts he had provided for them, and before they would retire to their rude beds after the day's work, though tired, the tumming of their banjoes, and the clear voices of the singing-born darkies gave an air to the farm which helped to preserve for the farmer his love for the old South. It was to this farm house that Marguerite Mason was invited to a house-party, and in her invitation were included the Whittlebys and their guest. Marguerite Mason and Ralph Whittleby had responded to the invitation, and were numbered among the gay crowd that was now making merry within the walls of the mansion, and the grove surrounding it. The house was filled with guests, and from early morning until late night the halls resounded with the echoes of the merry-making crowd.

The program was continuous; all care, if any member of the house-party had any care, was cast aside for sport and jollification. It was a merry party, indeed. Golf, tennis, croquet, gathering berries,—on the outside, and in the day time; dancing, music, cards, pool and billiards,— on the inside and in the evening. Could there be any wonder that time was passing rapidly, and that some forgot everything but their present environment?

It was at the end of the first week of the house-party, and none, it seemed, had grown weary of the week's sport; the farmer urged his daughter to extend the party for another week; the daughter needed no urging, and many of the party were glad for the invitation. One only, Marguerite Mason, was growing weary from the strain of the week's dissipation; she, therefore, expressed a desire to be excused, but no excuse was allowed, and the sports continued. Ralph Whittleby had gotten a letter from John Montcalm in the middle of the week, a few days after he had reached the farm; he had read it, crumbled it, and threw it into a waste basket in the room. And the sports went on, dancing at night, out-door sports by day.

It was the evening of the first day of the second week of the house-party. The house on the hill was to be especially gay on this evening; a grand ball was to be given, to which were invited not only the members of the house-party, but also the friends of the farmer and his daughter for miles around. The grove was transformed from a plain, simple grove of nature to a little fairy land; Japanese lanterns were added to the light of the full moon. An orchestra procured for the occasion from a near city was concealed beneath a heavy arbor, and its music added to the charms of the evening. The evening could not have been more perfect, both inside the old mansion and in the grove.

Ralph Whittleby, a leader among the entertainers, was in his own particular element, and, forgetful of all else, was literally enjoying himself. The evening's amusements were well advanced, when Ralph missed Marguerite Mason. She was called upon to sing for the crowd immediately after refreshments were served; Ralph, therefore, felt it his especial duty,—not honor, for all the honor as far as Ralph Whittleby was concerned was subjective—to escort

her to the piano. But Marguerite was nowhere to be found.

"Look here, Whittleby," said one of the male guests, "you and Miss Mason have formed a conspiracy to save her from singing; where have you concealed her? Speak."

The speaker seemed to Ralph to have emphasized the word you, and Ralph, therefore, filled with pride, answered that he would endeavor to restore Miss Mason to the tender mercies of the company. She was not to be found in the rooms of the house, so Ralph next searched through the grove; again his search was fruitless. Unsuccessful in his search, he would not return to the house, so he started to walk towards the huts occupied by the colored laborers and their families. As he walked he approached a young colored man coming towards him, banjo in his hand.

"Say, nigger, have you seen a young girl down here among these shacks? Now, nigger, don't lie to me; a fellow can't believe you lying—"

"Hol' on, mistah," quickly interrupted the colored fellow, "you speaks to me lak a gemman, and I answers you lak a gemman; but you

speaks to me lak white trash, and I answers dat way. I respecs dis banjo of mine mighty, sah, but you say dis nigga lie, den watch fo' dis banjo."

The colored fellow raised the banjo as if to strike, but Whittleby quickly drew back, growing pale with fright as he felt himself thus alone and defenceless before a colored fellow whom he had needlessly angered.

"Now, don't misunderstand me, my friend," answered Ralph, as he reached into his pocket for a coin; "here, take this and tell me if you have seen a young girl anywhere around here."

"Mistah, now I am sho you is no gemman; you calls dis nigga lyin' nigga, I raises my banjo, you gets white in you purty face, den you hands me money. I don't want yo' money, and I pity the hansom miss youse huntin' to spark; but I will be a gemman and tell you that she is dere in dat place;" the young colored man walked off. When he said, "I will be a gemman," he lingered for a long time on the "I," and Ralph felt his blood begin to boil. The colored scoundrel placed him, Ralph Whittleby, on a lower plane than himself! His first thought was to follow the fellow and trounce him thoroughly;

but he thought a second time; his second thought was the better one, for him, and he walked to the hut which had been pointed out to him.

Ralph walked up to the little cabin; there was no light within the hut, but the moon was full and its beams fell bright and clear on the cabin floor. He did not enter the cabin, but, slowly walking past it, he saw within the hut the object of his search, Marguerite Mason, sitting on an old soap box with her head buried deeply in the lap of an old colored woman, whose woolly hair plainly showed the white streaks of age.

"De good Lord bress my young miss and tak away de feva; de po chile, yo po head am a-achin' with de heat, and ole granny will hol' de cloths wet with coolin' wata on you po head. Dere, hain't dat a feelin' betta? I reckon dat de pussons up in de big house am a-makin' too much noise fo my purty miss; now, hain't dat so, chile?"

"Oh, granny, you are so very good," replied Marguerite, "my head was almost bursting with pain, and I felt that I must go away at once, so

I stole away and came down here. I knew that granny would help me; ah, that feels so good."

Ralph walked away unnoticed. He suddenly remembered the letter which John Montcalm had written to him, and which John had requested to be read to Miss Mason, the letter which he had torn to shreds and thrown into the waste basket. He had not thought of the letter until he had heard the little conversation between the old gray-haired negress, Hannah, and Marguerite Mason. The letter which John had written described the condition of the affairs at Hilldale; but Ralph, in the midst of the gayeties of the house-party, had no time for thought of the village. His father, he thought, would be well taken care of, and why should they shorten their pleasures at the farm? He would not say anything to Miss Mason about the letter, and she would therefore not be aware of the epidemic at home; "what she did not know would not hurt her." Ralph again stealthily walked past the cabin and looked in; old Hannah was just in the act of changing a cloth which she was taking from a basin full of fresh, cold water.

"Granny, oh, granny, why didn't I stay at home? Oh, why didn't he tell me of the danger that was hanging over our village? The letter of this afternoon explains all, and I now know that I am another victim; oh, my poor head, it will burst; my head, my head, granny, my head is whirling, but it is clear enough to know that I, too, am one of the sick of the village. Oh, granny, you are good, take me home, take me home to-night, at once; say you will."

"Fo de Lawd's sake, chile, don't go on lak dat; you sholy frightens ole Hannah. I shall see Massa at once, and shall ax him to tak my po chile home. Wait, chile, 'til granny comes back; it is lonesome here, but no one dassent tech my purty miss 'till I get back," and the old woman started to hobble up the road, aided by her cane, to the house on the top of the hill. Marguerite lay on an old shawl on the cabin floor, her face turned towards the door; she had her eyes closed, and a wet cloth, that had now become warm, over her forehead.

Ralph again walked past the cabin; seeing Marguerite, all alone, stretched out upon the floor, he withdrew for a second, looking in a window

that was partly closed by an old shutter hanging on one hinge.

"All alone! What beauty! She promised me an answer this week; what better opportunity will ever present itself than the present moment? All alone. It will take that old hag some time to hobble up to the house, and until then I shall have my answer. She wishes to get home this very night, sick, I fear, with the fever that has swooped down upon that hole of a village. In return for an answer, I shall promise to take her home at once."

Ralph quietly walked up to the door once more, and stood on the threshold of the cabin. A low moan came from the form on the floor; she opened her eyes, but closed them at once. Ralph remained silent.

"Yes, granny, it is better now," came from the floor, "and I shall go back to the dance! Yes, Mr. Whittleby, the dance,—the dance with you. What, another story? Is it possible that you forget, so, so soon? LeFre! Ah, John, is that you? My head, granny, oh, my head!" The girl on the floor rolled over, and the muffled word "water" came from the depth of the

negress' old shawl upon which Marguerite was lying.

"She has been asleep, I see," said Ralph to himself, "and in this dirty hut is becoming confused. I shall first speak to her, and then get her out of this. Miss Mason, Miss Mason!" he called, almost in a whisper; she did not answer, but again turning her head she mentioned the name of John.

Ralph walked into the hut, stooping that he might enter the door without striking his head. He stooped over the girl, now moaning and tossing about on the floor. Her face was again turned towards the open door, and the moon clearly revealed every line of the prostrate form of the girl. He stooped over her, her heated breath touched his face, and suddenly, losing self-control, he touched her forehead with his lips. The girl opened her eyes, and sat up, erect.

"Ah, Miss Mason, we have been hunting for you everywhere, and I, the lucky one, have found you here."

"You, you here, John?" asked the girl, staring wildly.

"No, not John, but Ralph Whittleby, who loves you, Miss Mason, loves you, Marguerite, more dearly than he can express in this hut. You promised me, Marguerite—"

"I, Marguerite Mason! That letter, sick, the village! Mr. Montcalm, so good!"

"What letter, Miss Mason? Don't you know me, Ralph Whittleby, your lover? What letter?"

Hearing Ralph mention the letter, Marguerite quickly pressed her hand to her bosom and drew forth a letter. But, again pressing both of her hands to her aching head, the letter dropped to the floor. Ralph quickly picked it up and, recognizing the hand-writing to be that of John Montcalm's, he opened it and read it. John had written to Miss Mason, acquainting her with the condition of the village, supposing that "you are still unaware of the epidemic, even though I had written to Ralph several days ago, giving him the full details. The hall is filled to overflowing with patients, and we have ordered by telegraph a tent and a supply of cots, that we may be ready for all cases that need our attention. The town is contributing liberally, both money and work.

Can we count on you for financial help? I ask this of you, feeling that it is only what you would desire." Ralph read the entire letter, and angrily crumpled it up and pitched it out through the open door.

"Miss Mason, Marguerite, speak to me, Ralph Whittleby. Don't you know me? Here, I shall cool your head with fresh water. That's good; now, don't you know me?"

The water restored her for the moment from her dazed condition, and opening her eyes she asked where she was.

"Right here, by the side of a man who loves you, who now asks you for the one word which can make him happy for life. Marguerite, won't you look at me?"

"Is that you, Mr. Whittleby? Oh, my poor head aches so fearfully! But what did you say? Happy for life, did you say?"

"Yes, yes," quickly answered Ralph, realizing that she was now fully conscious; "Miss Mason, may I not hope to get that answer at this time, that answer you promised me? Promise, Marguerite, promise me that you will be my wife; will you promise?" Ralph was talking

rapidly, but almost in whispers, with his face close to the feverish face of the girl.

"My head, it aches; oh, the pain, the pain! You ask for a promise? Oh, my throbbing head, my head! What, a promise? The dance? Yes, the dance. What is that, that—that?" the girl almost shrieked, as she pointed her finger toward Ralph, "plain, plain, I see it; yes, yes, before, before, once before, that story, LeFre! I see it,—a long—red—scar!" Marguerite had again become wildly delirious, and throwing herself from his arms she buried her head in the shawl on the floor of the cabin. Ralph arose, much frightened, and walked to the door. He saw coming down the hill the old negress, her massa, and several of the guests.

With the help of the farmer and of the guests, Marguerite was tenderly and carefully carried to the house, and at once placed in bed. The guests were informed of the condition in which Marguerite was found, and for the rest of the evening the noise of the hall was much lessened. The farmer began to make preparations for the removal of the sick girl early the next morning; these preparations, however, were being made much against his will, but Ralph

demanded—had he not the right to say what was to be done?—that she should be removed to the village. The farmer promised the best care, the most skillful physician, and the best trained nurse that could be procured, if she would be allowed to remain at the farm. But Ralph insisted that she be moved early in the morning back to Hilldale, informing the farmer of the conditions prevailing at the village, and the plans that were being pursued in caring for the sick. The farmer then yielded, saying that, if he could not keep her at the farm, which plan he considered the better, he would at least see that she would be given a comfortable journey home.

The guests of the evening had departed and the old mansion on the hill was again quiet. Ralph was in his room preparing for bed; he had no light in the room, only the moon shining through the open window. He took a chair to the window, and with his head resting on his hands, with elbows on the window sill, he cast his eyes over the land of the farm. From his window he could plainly see the little hut from which they had carried Marguerite only a little while before; there, right before that cabin,

he said to himself, he was insulted by a common nigger; he, Ralph Whittleby, the son of a much respected minister; he, Ralph Whittleby, himself a church leader, he, the head of his class at college! There in that miserable hut itself he again failed in his attempt to secure a promise from the girl! The scar! What did she mean? Only the delirium of a sick girl, he concluded.

"But I will win; her farm, that beautiful mansion near the village, with its wealth,—shall it fall to some country bumpkin of the village? Its wealth,—what ambitions could it not satisfy? I will win; I must win. A scar,—oh, hang the scar; did I not come by it honorably? John Montcalm, so good, yes, with his heresy; even the fever itself, no one or nothing shall prevent me from winning. Ah, I have it now; thank God for the fever, for it shall aid me. She must be taken to the hall with the rest of the fever patients; I shall nurse her day and night; I also will be good; the rest will then be easy."

He arose from his chair, and picking up the chair he hurled it to its place; he then went to bed, and it was not long until he was sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER XV.

THE good village folks had, indeed, responded liberally to the appeals which had come from Dr. Rutherling and John Montcalm; of money there was sufficient to procure all that was necessary for the proper treatment of all patients admitted to the hall and to the tent. The tent was placed on a vacant lot adjoining the hall, and now the village folks had, for them, this unusual sight, this strange method of combating the fever epidemic.

The epidemic was now at its height; both the hall and the tent were filled with patients, the former with the convalescents, of whom there were as yet very few, and the milder cases, the latter with the more severe cases. The fever had come as a thief in the night to attack the village unprepared; it was ready to do the worst, to depopulate the little Maryland town, and even to erase its name from the map. But in John Montcalm it had met a foe, who from the very inception of the fever was willing and

eager to fight for the village and its people. Night and day his services were demanded, and they were freely given when demanded. Only through the earnest solicitations of his friends—and the whole village was his friend!—would he occasionally take a rest from the arduous duties of the hall and the tent; his little body was becoming less agile and his actions less energetic, but he continued to stick to his post, bathing the feverish bodies of the afflicted, and offering words of consolation and farewell to an occasional patient who was not strong enough to resist the onslaughts of the fever. The ruddy color had left his cheeks, and dark circles were playing around his eyes; but his work was there in the hall or in the tent, and he could not be induced to forsake it. Were not the grateful words that came to him from the sick as he passed their beds ample rewards for him, were not they sufficient to keep John at this, his post of duty?

John had just left the tent on an errand to the village drug store; as he was leaving the tent, Dr. Rutherling walked up to him with a telegram in his hand.

"Here, John, my good fellow, is a telegram; why, John, what is the matter with you? Are

you sure you are not overtaxing your strength? With the sun striking you in the face as it did when you came out of the tent, you looked not much unlike that skeleton in my closet at home. Here, John, this will never do; you must remember that you can perform your duty here properly only in proportion as you take the necessary rest yourself."

"Never mind me, doctor; I think that I am still equal to any occasion that may yet arise; but from whom is the telegram?" John sought the shade of a tree as he spoke, and reached for the telegram.

"Now, listen, John; not until this moment did I fully appreciate the fact that you are overworking yourself. I have been so much interested in the good work that is being done here,—and I tell you that the people know that John Montcalm is the hero of the hour—"

"Please, don't, doctor; but what means the telegram?" interrupted John.

"Now, John, if you will not listen to my words about yourself, probably you shall be interested in the anxious inquiries concerning your health from one, whose name I hardly need mention. Just this morning she almost

compelled me to promise to limit your work either to day or night duty; you see, John, whereas all our faithful workers have been limited to duty either during the day or night, you alone have been working almost throughout the twenty-four hours."

"How about Dr. Rutherling?" asked John.

"O he is an old hand, and is accustomed to such things, and I suppose even he, were he honest, would confess to a need of rest."

"Well, doctor, I promise to rest up a little as soon as we feel that we are getting the best of the fever; but now the telegram, doctor."

"The telegram simply informs us that we must prepare another bed in the tent; your friend, Ralph Whittleby, will arrive to-day with Miss Mason, who, according to the telegram, is very sick. Well, we can make room for the girl, but the scarcer that *deuc'*ed rascal, the ungrateful son, makes himself around here, the better it will be for him."

As the doctor finished speaking he looked down at John, and noticed more clearly than ever that he was much overworked; the sunken cheeks and hollow eyes indicated to the doctor that either John was sick or that he

would soon be entirely exhausted if he would not rest his wearied body. He began to tear the telegram into small pieces, and then called to John, who had again started for the store.

"John, my boy, if not for my sake, if not for your own sake, then for the sake of another, you must promise me,—John, you cannot realize what it means for me to make this change, but we must do it. Ralph Whittleby is returning home; he, I suppose, is in the best of health, and there should be at least some good in that athletic form of his. I had just said that it were better for him to make himself scarce around the hospital, but I take that back, and"—

"O, doctor, please go no further; I know what you would say, but listen to me; I promise you this much, that as soon as I find myself incapable of doing further work, I shall then ask to be replaced by Ralph Whittleby. And, doctor, please remember the circumstances; Miss Mason will be a patient, and cannot you understand how little use he would therefore be to other patients?"

"Probably you are right, John, and we shall make no change for the present; but be

careful of your health, for your absence would be sorely felt. Where are you going?"

"To the drug store; our stock of medicines must be replenished. Good-bye."

John walked down the street to the store, and the doctor continued his walk to the hall. Arriving at the drug store, John met Dad Johnson.

"Hello, youngster, how be things at the the hospital? Lad, lad, I saw one sorrerful sight this morning that made Dad Johnson older by many days, and then thinks I to myself what a blessin' it was that you and Doc had the tendance of our poor willage folks. Oh, how often would the same scene been repeated if you and Doc weren't here. You have stood by the willage folks faithful, you and Doc have, and we willagers be like Injuns, we don't forget good deeds done fur us."

"Thank you, Dad, but what was the sad scene you saw to-day?" asked John.

"I got a paper this mornin', lad," answered Dad, "which said as how I should come with my hack fur a little tot that was sick with the fever; his ma said that I should take him to the hall. She had the word hospital written fust in the

letter; I noticed that myself, though I ain't given much to noticin' when it comes to readin' things, but it strikes me as bein' something peculiar, fur why did she strike out the word hospital? I asks myself. I hitched up and drove the ambylance to the house, that one with the green shutters at tother end of town. When I opened the door the ma, she comes out cryin' and says fur me to come in quick, that mebbe I can make her boy speak to her. I goes into the room, and there at first sight I seen that I was too late, the little tot had gone to the angels, and he was a purty kid. Well, I asks the ma why she didn't send fur me sooner, and she just sprawled right down over the youngster, and between her cryin' and callin' the youngster to come back I could hear that she had fear fur the hospital. An, lad, that was a piece of ignorance; I could not help saying' as I left the house, that there was a sacrifice to ignorance. Our hospital and our ambylance,—bless them both, and bless the Doc, and bless you, lad."

The past few weeks of the epidemic and its scenes had changed Dad from a jovial old man to one of seriousness and sorrow. At times he would awaken from his sleep at night and then

rub his eyes; perchance he was dreaming of the old village days when sickness was unknown; awaking from his dream he would wonder how it was with the village; was it still the unscarred old village, or was Death stalking about even at that same moment, looking for the next victim? Was it well with the village? Arising from his bed he would walk to his window, from which could be seen the village cemetery; no longer could he then be in doubt. "No, Dad," he would say to himself, "your dream of the willage of the past be only a dream; the fever came, and there be its victims in the grave yard. There is the new grave that is holdin' all that is left of Ed Ganton; I have said many things about poor old Ed. True, he wasn't much good helpin' his little woman, but then Ed wouldn't harm no one. He couldn't stand the fever, and is gone. Then, there be the graves of several youngsters who used to ride horsey on old Dad's knees; why was they taken in their young days and old Dad left? But the minister himself says as how we musn't question the doins of the Lord, and I suppose he is right, and I won't complain. But, then, somehow I can't see how the Lord, if he is good, could sit up there in the sky and watch all

this sufferin' and sorrowin' in our poor willage; and some would even say as how such things do be sent for punishment. Would a good Lord punish our little willage because those dirty scamps camped up there on the hill above the willage? There be an old hymn which I recerlect my old mother singin', which says as how God moves in mysterious ways and as how He does wonderful things, and so it ain't no use fur us tryin' to explain things. But I know this much, that if God sends sich things upon the willage as the fever, He won't let the willage without no help. There is lad John, as good a lad as the sun ever shined on. And when he fust comed to the willage, the whole willage didn't trust him, because old Deacon Smith said as how he didn't believe right. It would be dangerous for old Smith—he is too green and tough for the fever to burn—to say anything agin the lad now;" still eulogizing John, old Dad would return to his bed and sleep, to dream of better days that were to come to the village.

* * * * *

Another week had passed. The clock on the town hall had just struck twelve, midnight; all was quiet in the sleeping village. Dim lights

could be seen only in the hall and the tent; the hall too was resting quietly, and but for the occasional visits that were made around the hall, the passer-by would hardly think that it contained a large number of fever patients, some of whom had almost tasted of death. In the tent there was a different scene, for it contained a number of patients who were even yet in the shadow of death. On this particular night Ralph Whittleby stood guard over the tent and its occupants. For him only one had any special interest, Marguerite Mason, whose bed was at the far end of the tent; she had now passed the crisis and could have been moved to the hall, had there been any room for her there; but the hall was still full of patients. Marguerite's case was a severe one, but remarkably short, and her rapid recovery was a surprise to Dr. Rutherling. Since she had returned to the village she had not seen Ralph Whittleby; the latter had not been allowed to visit the tent, his visits being limited to the hall, where his father was slowly recovering.

The clock had just finished striking the hour of midnight; its striking awoke Marguerite. She was very weak, and her lips and tongue

plainly showed the ravages of the fever. A little water from the hands of John Montcalm had cooled her lips and tongue so often, and the same hands had so skillfully arranged her pillow and her bed, that upon her awaking this night she raised her hands that she might again signal those same hands of John; he had never failed her, nor would he fail her this time, she thought. Attempting to rise, she found that she had misjudged her strength, and she fell back on the cot. For the moment she experienced the same whirling motion that she had felt for the first time on the cabin floor. But it lasted only a moment; she then reached for the bell that hung suspended from her bedpost, and gave it a little pull.

"Well, I sappose my work has begun for the night, just when I was getting interested in the pages of this book, too;" Ralph Whittleby laid aside the book. He could not at once tell who wanted him; he had heard the tinkle of the bell, but as he was reading at the time under the dim light of the candle, he was not sure from what direction it came. "If I am needed badly, the bell will ring again," he said to himself, once more reaching for the book.

Again the bell tinkled, and this time Ralph was sure that the sound came from the direction of Miss Mason's bed. He quickly arose from his chair and walked to her bed. This was the one chance for which he was waiting.

"Poor, poor John—" the words came from the bed as Ralph approached it; but the words suddenly ceased, and Marguerite gave a little scream, which she quickly muffled in her pillow. Ralph walked up to her bed; he again heard John's name.

"Marguerite," be began, kneeling before her bed, "it is not John, as you would see if you would but turn your head. I thank God, Marguerite, that He is restoring you to those who love you."

"Oh, Mr. Whittleby, where is John Montcalm? Thank him, thank John Montcalm, for he has been the good ministering angel in this tent. For hours I would lie awake, watching his frail little body totter, yes almost totter from bed to bed through the long night, handling us with the delicate touch of a woman, and yet with the skill of one trained in nursing. What a grand personage is confined in that little body of his! Where is he to-night, for,

if I remember rightly, this was to be his night on duty?"

Her words were coming slowly, for her tongue was still thick and her lips dry.

"Miss Mason, no I mean Marguerite, cannot I take the place of John Montcalm?"

"Mr. Whittleby, forgive me for saying it, but did you not forsake the village for the house party?"

"I did it only for your sake, Marguerite, that you should be at a safe distance from the fever-stricken village. Oh, God, Miss Mason, won't you heed my pleadings? Won't you listen to one who loves you and who would serve you for the rest of his life?"

"Answer me, Mr. Whittleby, where is John Montcalm?" replied Marguerite.

"He is sick; nervous exhaustion, says the doctor, and he could therefore not come on duty to-night. He was good enough to ask me to substitute for him"—this with a sneer; "I suppose even the good John is becoming tired of this incessant moaning, these vile odors, and the continual cry for water, water;" this Ralph said to himself as he was returning to Marguerite's bed with a glass of water.

"Marguerite," again began Ralph, as he took the empty glass from her hand, "this is the opportunity for which I have been waiting since you were first brought to this tent. It was through me that you were brought here, and oh, believe me, I brought you from the house party that I might have the privilege of nursing you back to health. Had I known that I should be forbidden admittance to the tent through the machinations—or why was it?—of John Montcalm, you should have staid back in the farm house, where you could have had professional nursing."

"Yes, I suppose you would have wished me the comforts of that negro cabin; but please say nothing about the good deeds of John Montcalm, for we of the tent know him and his motives."

The tent was nearly dark, only the flickering of the candle at the other end of the tent throwing its dim light across the beds; when it reached Marguerite's bed, it had almost lost all of its feeble little power. Ralph was still kneeling beside her bed, and Marguerite now quickly raising her head, opened her eyes and looked at Ralph. She saw his face, profile; the

dim light of the candle feebly played around the scar above his eye. Marguerite plainly saw the scar and quickly closed her eyes; she was once more back on the floor of the negro cabin; she again placed her hand to her head as if she were again suffering the same pain she did in the cabin; Ralph's words, which did not half impress the semi-delirious girl on the cabin floor, now vividly came back to her. "Promise me to be my wife; make me happy for life;" these words now came back to her. She now remembered that she was on the cabin floor; she remembered Ralph entering the door, and she remembered that she was happy as he entered the door. He had asked her to be his wife, and she now thought that she was just about to give the promise, when a pain shot through her head, which made her dizzy. She remembered that he was persistent, that with all her pain and fever she was proud that this man before her should wish to make her his wife; she was ready to say yes to his appeal, but—and the poor girl trembled as she lay there on the bed—she saw a long red scar, and then knew nothing until she opened her eyes in the tent

and heard John Montcalm and Dr. Rutherling talking beside her bed.

"Marguerite, will you have more water?" Ralph almost whispered as he offered the glass; "let me change your pillow; it will be much more comfortable. If we could only have you at home, away from the rest of the patients, I am sure you would feel much better."

"Mr. Whittleby, I am no better than the rest of the patients; I am feeling very comfortable, I thank you."

She again closed her eyes; this time she was not in the old negro cabin, but instead of her memory carrying her back to the cabin, she now remembered the many pleasant walks she and Ralph Whittleby enjoyed together since his return from college; their chats in the hammock in her own yard; their little luncheons taken together in the grove, where even early in the summer he had confessed his love for her; the first week of the house party when she and Ralph stole away from the rest of the party, and—but she would not dare think of some of those walks, some of which they had taken long after the rest of the party had retired to their rooms for the night. Marguerite now opened

her eyes and, seeing Ralph kneeling beside her bed, she felt herself again yielding to his influence, and as she was slowly yielding, she began once again to feel herself the free-from-care, light-hearted, happy girl of the summer. Would he again ask her the same question he had asked her in the cabin? If he would, she felt almost ready to give an answer.

Ralph Whittleby was still kneeling at her bed; she seemed to reach for his hand; Ralph quickly seized her hand, and, pressing it to his lips, he felt that if he would win the girl it must be done at once.

"Marguerite," his dark eyes flashed as he spoke, "Marguerite, why delay longer, why not at once give me the answer"—Marguerite smiled, and Ralph was quick to notice it; hence he continued kneeling there, prepared to seize the girl as a cat would pounce upon its prey—"that would make me happy? Give me that answer, Marguerite, dearest Marguerite,"—he felt that he was winning at last—"and I will return to my night's work happy with the thought that I have won, that at last I have won. The answer, Marguerite?"

"Mr. Whittleby, Ralph," began Marguerite, speaking softly, "Ralph, I"—What Marguerite said or would have said was lost in an unearthly, muffled shriek that seemed to have come from the very bowels of the earth.

"Murder—help — murder — murder!" the words were shrieked through the tent and were carried out into the clear night throughout the village.

"Murder—murder—help!" The patient, a powerful man, was standing at the head of the tent. In his delirium he had stealthily crawled from his bed to the table that was holding the candle and the different medicines. Ralph, kneeling at the bed of Marguerite, had his back turned to the other patients of the tent, and therefore had neglected all the other patients except the one to whom he was talking. He quickly arose and saw the patient, clad only in a night-robe, standing before all the patients of the tent. The patient's look was fiendish as he stood there yelling "murder," with the flickering light of the candle in one hand, and the little iron stool that was beside the table in the other, waving it over his head. The patient stood there, master of the situation, ready to

brain the first person who would dare to approach. His eyes were bulging from their sockets; his hair, long and black, much disheveled, to Ralph he seemed the very devil incarnate. The delirium of the patient was increasing; louder and louder grew the "murder, murder, help!" To the patient, as he stood at the head of the other tent patients, each little white bed or cot was a new enemy, ready to attack and kill. He swung the candle through the air; its shadows created a hundred other shadows, or devils, which were waiting for a chance to strike. Thus he stood his ground, yelling, crying, gurgling "Murder, help," swinging the candle and the iron stool through the air.

All the patients were now awake; they remained quiet, realizing that course to be their only salvation. They all looked toward Ralph, who was now standing beside Marguerite's bed; Ralph was shaking in every bone, trembling in every muscle, as he felt himself helpless before the wild man. The tent was too dark for Ralph to see the patients, but he felt that they were looking to him for protection; he could see only one thing, the delirious patient standing his

ground, hurling and waving the stool of iron and the candle through the air. Ralph attempted to walk, but his legs were paralyzed. Good God, he thought, what was he to do? Dare he run and leave the tent to the mercy of the wild man? He quickly hurled a prayer to heaven for help, for strength; his prayer was unanswered, for his limbs were growing weaker and weaker. Did he hear, or did he only imagine that he heard the voice of Marguerite at his shoulder urging him to protect the tent and the patients? Another prayer to heaven; it also was unanswered. He made another attempt to move towards the shrieking, wildly delirious man, but his legs were rapidly failing him. Once more he thought he heard Marguerite urge him on to duty, urging him on "for her sake and for the sake of that promise." Those were the words which were now ringing, whirling through his brain, as his legs grew still weaker. Must he fail, must he whose duty it was faithfully to guard the tent, must he leave the tent to the mercy of that demon at the front of the tent, there waving the iron stool and shrieking "murder!"

"My God, I am falling, I can't do it; I will run for help, for help. Help!" With these words he turned to an opening in the tent near Marguerite's bed; but it was too late, for fear had conquered, and Ralph Whittleby fell in a faint to the ground.

Marguerite, realizing what had happened, arose in her bed. Must the patients be left to the mercy of this wild man, she asked herself, because one had failed in the performance of his duty? She pressed her lips firmly together, and steeled herself for the occasion, rising from her bed; she had gotten half way up the tent, keeping herself as much as possible behind the beds, when she noticed a crouching, crawling form of a man creeping snake-like towards the delirious man, the latter still waving the stool, and shrieking more loudly than ever. That horrible, creeping form, what is it? she thought. Must she now handle two persons instead of one?

It was the work of but a moment for the crouching man to reach the front of the tent, and with an animal-like leap he jumped upon the patient's back, striking him a heavy blow upon the back of his neck, hurling the delirious man senseless to the ground, the iron stool falling from

his hands with a heavy thud. Marguerite supported herself, for she felt herself growing weak; she awaited further action. She had only a moment to wait, for, looking to the front of the tent, she saw a man relighting the candle which was extinguished in its fall. The man was John Montcalm.

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Order was soon restored in the tent;—the patient was carried to his bed and shackled. Attention was then to be given to Ralph Whittleby, and after assisting Marguerite to her bed, John Montcalm looked for Ralph that he might render him the necessary assistance, but Whittleby was beyond the reach of John's assistance; he had disappeared.

THE FROST WAS BREAKING THE LITTLE BURRS OF THE CHINQUAPINS.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE summer for the Maryland village had passed, and autumn was well advanced. The frost was bursting the little burrs of the chinquapins, and the village boys with light hearts were beginning their excursions after these nuts, the favorite nuts of Maryland boys. It was, indeed, chinquapin time, and no one was better aware of the fact than the boys; the happy nut-gathering boys and girls had no care, no thought for the past or future; school was no sooner closed for the day than the nut-gatherers started across the fields, and followed the narrow lanes which led to the sandy, barren lands, barren of all else except the low shrubs, upon which grew these little nuts, the delight of the village girls and boys; among the bushes, their laughter rang out, loud and clear, and with pockets bulging, and old bags—old salt bags were good enough—filled, they turned their way back to the village. For them the summer was a thing of the past; true, a bench or two might

be vacant in the school room, and in the calling of the roll on the first morning of the school session, the teacher probably began a name only to leave it unfinished and hasten on to the next name, the owner of the latter responding so heartily, indeed, that the school children forgot to look at the vacant bench. The memories of the village childhood, at least the memories for past sorrows, are very elastic; how easy it is for childhood to forget the sorrows of the past in the joys of the present! Childhood in the Maryland village is, indeed, happy; with the exception of a few hours spent in the little red school building, all other time was holiday for the Hilldale boys and girls. Knowing no place and nothing else than their own village, not familiar with the large world of experience that lay beyond their own little town, almost lost, as it was, among the Maryland hills, the children were contented, and, being contented, they were happy. They were now busy gathering chinquapins; all else, even their school books very often, was forgotten.

The old folks of the village were also busy with the duties that come with the autumn months. Many of the Hilldale people had little

farms just outside the little town; preparations, therefore, for the coming winter were evident on every side. The corn was to be cut and gathered; apples picked and cider made; the grape-arbors stripped and the wine safely deposited in the cellar—who can forget this part of the autumn work that has ever enjoyed the hospitality of a Christmas season in a Maryland village? The fall butchering!—ask the Hilldale children what season of the year has most delight for them, and in a quick jumble you can pick out the words, "the time of butcherin';" "chinquapins," "pumpkins," "Jack-o-lanterns." This is the busy season for a Maryland village; awaking from a summer lethargy, the village people are now busy for a season, forgetful of the past in its preparations for the winter months, when they shall again forget everything else but parties, church socials, and amateur performances for charity,—possibly for a mission church in a far city about which they knew little, and cared even less. Such is village life in Maryland, and who can regret a childhood thus spent?

There were some in Hilldale, however, who had not forgotten the past summer; indeed, there were many who had occasion to remember

this particular summer which was to go down in village history as the "fever time." The fall was rapidly passing, and it was now the season of thanksgiving.

Long ago the hall, the village hall, was restored to its original condition, a place for church festivals and amateur shows; long ago the tent—who of the village can ever forget the associations of the hall and the tent?—was returned to the city. There were no signs left of the past summer except the freshly made graves in the Hilldale cemetery, and now these graves, too, were looking old, scarred by the winds and frosts of the late fall. The signs of the fever were everywhere growing less, and though many still remembered the fever and its work, yet Hilldale was once again the same village which Dad Johnson and the other village people loved.

The minister's family had especial reason to keep fresh in memory the summer that had just passed; the minister had regained his usual health and had returned to his work in the church. Though fully recovered from the effects of the fever he, however, could not appear before his congregation with the same freedom of action and thought as he could before the disappear-

ance of his son Ralph. After the night when Ralph Whittleby had so miserably failed in his duty as guardian over the fever patients, nothing was heard of or from him; only a telegram one day came to the minister which informed him that "I have left the village; you shall hear nothing from me until I can return to you a worthy son; trust me. Signed,—Ralph W." The telegram bore no date nor address, and Ralph Whittleby disappeared from the village history as if he had been a victim of the summer's epidemic. The minister's one great consolation was that part of the telegram which read, "Trust me;" that he preserved, but the remainder of the telegram he destroyed.

John Montcalm's appearance in the tent on that memorable night was the culminating act of the many which endeared him to the whole village, and made him an object almost of worship. The wild screams of the delirious patient had attracted others of the village to the the tent; Dad Johnson arrived in time to see John strike the big fellow to the ground, and then stood still until John again lighted the candle. John had just gotten Marguerite safely to her bed, when his head began to grow dizzy; for him the

tent again became dark. By this time, however, he was in the strong arms of old Dad, and was soon carried to the parsonage, a case of complete nervous prostration. Upon his final recovery, John was advised to recuperate at a seaside resort; there he again grew strong, but it was late in the fall before he returned to his own home, the college town. College was already in session; the students had returned, and many and various were the stories told of the experience of the past vacation.

"Where was Ralph Whittleby?" This question John answered only by rehearsing the events of the fever epidemic, and the break down of several who had attended the sick; Ralph would finish his college course later; as for himself he thought he would be able to return to his work after his Thanksgiving vacation; the college boys could make their own inferences, John thought.

The morning of Thanksgiving had arrived. Dad Johnson arose early, and just as it was beginning to grow light he began to clean his hack, washing it thoroughly, inside and outside.

"Hello, Dad, what's up, that you are cleaning your hack at this unearthly hour?" asked

a young man who had raised a window to see who was tampering with Johnson's old hack.

"What, hain't you heerd? That there hack must be the spick-spannest, cleanest hack in this whole country of ours to-day. This be Thanksgiving Day, you know; but hain't you heerd, now honest, hain't you?"

"Dad, you must be going clean crazy; haven't I heard what? Is there another epidemic of fever, and you are cleaning your hack for that? Say, Dad, what's up?"

"No, there hain't no fever," quickly replied Dad; "didn't I say as how this be Thanksgiving Day, and the willage will be honored by the presence of the best lad in the whole world."

"What, is John Montcalm coming to the village to-day?"

"Ha, ha, I knowed as how you would know who the best lad in the world was; yes, John Montcalm will be wisitin' the willage this day, this Thanksgiving Day, and old Dad Johnson will fetch him to town in the old hack."

The sun hardly had a chance to shine over the village before every individual in the village, man, woman, and child, knew that the hack would stop at the parsonage that morning with

a person who would be a guest not so much of the minister's family as of the whole village; at least so Hilldale had spontaneously decided. The Thanksgiving dinner, they also decided, should be eaten in the town hall, and as soon as they had so decided, preparations were begun at once for the dinner. Great preparations were made in the hall, great changes so that the hall would not be recognized as the same place in which those memorable events occurred only a few months previous.

Long before the time arrived for the hack to return from the station, a large crowd gathered at the parsonage; the sun was beginning to shine brightly, and the heavy frost that had settled upon the village was now sparkling with exquisite beauty. The crowd grew larger every minute; the whole village had turned out to honor its guest, the village's guest. Little Josie was elevated high upon the shoulders of a tall man; the little fellow was high above the heads of all in the crowd; the crowd was awaiting patiently the minute of the hack's arrival.

"There she comes; there's old Dad, there's John on the seat with Dad; hurrah, I saw him

first!" the little fellow, raised high in the air, fairly shrieked out the words, and the crowd, looking down the street, saw John Montcalm, the hero of the village.

The minister was the first to greet John and to welcome him back to Hilldale; and then, in quick succession, John shook the hands of—the village, except one, who for John was the biggest, the best part of the village. Where was she? Why was she not there to meet, to greet him? Very quickly the thoughts of John went back to the time when he for the first time made his appearance in the village; at that time—how well he now recalled it!—he met her under the old oak tree. At this time, on this Thanksgiving Day, where else should he find her but under the branches of the oak? Where else should he want to find her but under its dear old branches? John escaped through the crowd with,—"Yes, anywhere, but please let me through; why certainly, my turkey dinner, yes, at the hall, anywhere with you good people; glad to see you all, but may I not get through into the parsonage? You know I have not seen Mrs. Whittleby; hello, hello, yes, feeling first

rate, fine, never better; oh, please, don't mention it now; shall see you all at the Thanksgiving dinner at the hall!" He pushed himself through the crowd, and, laughing heartily, fairly ran into the house, through the house, to the oak. He was not disappointed; there he found Mary Whittleby, awaiting him, she, the queen, awaiting her hero, her king.

The branches of the oak began to sway gently to and fro in the Thanksgiving sunshine; the oak alone could feel the beating of the two hearts under its branches. The oak alone shared the Thanksgiving secret, and who would betray the grand old oak?

* * * * *

John was resting in the minister's study, preparatory to going to the Thanksgiving dinner which was to be given in his honor. He was alone; reclining on the minister's couch, he reviewed the events which had followed each other in such quick succession during the last vacation. He had come to the village for a rest; he now smiled at the word rest. What a summer it had been! What a meaning it had for him! As he was thus meditating upon

the summer's events, little Josie quietly opened the door, and walked into the room.

"Are you asleep, Mr. John? Mother said if you are not asleep, I am to give you this letter, and if you are asleep, I should give it to you anyway; I think that is what she said." Josie walked up to the couch very quietly, even after he saw that John was not asleep. He gave John the letter and walked out as quietly as he had entered.

John took the letter, which was forwarded to him from his home; he did not recognize the writing, so he quickly opened it and read; The letter was from Marguerite Mason.

He read:—

"*My dear John!*

"Pardon me, please, for addressing you thus familiarly, but to me you are John Montcalm, the hero of fever epidemics, and one who changes destinies; at least you changed my destiny. Now I can almost see you smile, and probably you are wondering how you had or have sufficiently entered into my life to have changed the life, the useless life I was leading in Hilldale. By the time you read this letter, you shall probably already know that I am a so-called proba-

tioner at this city hospital; I hope to win my cap, the nurse's first ambition, in a short time. I am happy, entirely happy in this, my new sphere, and, though it is so entirely different from my former lazy life, I count myself as already acclimated. The work is very interesting, and I am only honest when I tell you that I believe that I shall prove successful in my profession. And for all that I thank John Montcalm, who, on his part, unconsciously revealed to me my better self. What a light, empty, frivolous life I was leading! How entirely useless I was both to myself and to everybody else! I am only now beginning to realize this. Probably you will be glad to know how I changed from my former life of self-satisfaction to this one, and it is for the purpose of giving you this information that I am now writing to you.

"First, I must tell you,—or do you know it without my telling you?—that Providence or fate, or whatever you call it, was kind to me during the past summer, kinder than I deserved. You may not believe in any such thing as magnetic influence, but during the entire summer I confess that I was within its sphere. On several occasions I was about to yield to this in-

fluence, but each time—I did not see it then—fate intervened; I was saved, only, however, for that particular time. Again and again I was about to yield to the same influence, but thank God, fate—I suppose that is only another word for God—was kind and saved me each time. I may be talking a mysterious language, but I cannot, and I suppose I need not, explain more fully. Probably you are wondering from what fate I was saved. Listen then, and make your own inferences.

"Not very long after I was admitted to this hospital, I was given a very severe accident case to attend; from all appearances the man whom I was attending was a most degraded character. After he recovered sufficiently to converse, I learned that I was nursing one of the class termed Bohemians; he worked only when hunger compelled him to work, his work consisting, indeed, in writing for a very respectable magazine. At other times he said he could be found at very suspicious places, drinking, and, in general, leading a very disreputable life. 'That's the way we Bohemian's live,' he would say. On one occasion he became very talkative, and began to tell me of his companions; he men-

tioned to me a name, Mr. Montcalm, which I need not repeat to you. This companion, he said, was only a new recruit, and after being admitted to his circle of Bohemians, he 'went it pretty fast.' My patient said he could not understand this new member of the 'gang.' I am glad to tell you, however, that my patient further told me that a few days before he was brought to the hospital, he had lost track of the new recruit, and that one of his pals told him, that the new member of the 'gang' had left the city, 'meaning to take a brace.' The patient told me many other things, but I shall hope to forget them all in my work here.

"Mr. Montcalm, I was honest during the past summer; at times I believed that an honest heart had won me, but my eyes were opened, and I am thankful that they were not opened when it should have been too late. I am now happy in my work, knowing that I am of some use to humanity. What might have been if, if, if, well, if I had not gotten the fever, and if fate had not literally forced my eyes open to his true nature. I can never tell you sufficiently well, how I admired the noble, the splendid work you were doing for our village people, and as I

lay there on my bed in the tent, watching you and the other faithful workers at your work, I began to wonder if I could not also help my fellow creatures in the same way. I had about decided on my course, but then once more that old influence returned; once more I was about to yield,—but I need go no further, for you know what else I would say. That night I decided on my future work.

"How one summer can change a person's whole life! Last summer changed mine, and, Mr. Montcalm, may I not hope that the past summer changed the life also for two persons whom I count as my most faithful, my dearest friends? May I mention their names—Mary Whittleby and John Montcalm? Probably I am taking too much for granted; but no, for it could not be otherwise. Forgive me, please, for thus anticipating, but remember that you, yes, I shall say it, and my dear, dear Mary shall always have the very best wishes of Marguerite Mason.

"But I find that I have written quite at length. I hope you have fully recovered your health. With this same mail, I am also send-

ing a letter to my very best friend, Mary Whittleby.

"Now I must close; forget me as the careless, the thoughtless girl of the past summer, and try to think of me as one whose sole aim is to serve humanity. Good-bye!

Sincerely,

MARGUERITE MASON."

CHAPTER XVII.

NEVER before was the old town hall the scene of such rejoicing and good will. Invitations, sufficient in number to fill the places around the table, had been issued; every invitation was accepted.

It was Thanksgiving Day for the village; the turkeys which were to have graced the tables of private homes were carried to the hall and added to the bounties with which the long tables were supplied. Everybody was there, from the minister, who occupied the seat at the head of the longest table, to old Dad Johnson, who was "consarned if that wasn't the purtiest sight he ever seen, with all them turkeys, their drum-sticks stickin' straight up, and that cranberry sass, and that crisp celery; oh, I kin see and taste them yit." Not only was everybody there, but everything was there, from turkey down to the famous Maryland biscuits.

The dinner was late; the appetites were, therefore, so much the keener. By pre-arrange-

ment, the village folks had taken the seats that were assigned to them, that they might be there when the guest of honor would arrive.

All that morning the village was busy; the village people concluded that they would leave nothing undone to make this occasion one of the most memorable in the whole history of Hilldale. There was to be no speech-making, they said, for they did not want to weaken anybody's appetite with the feeling that they had to make a speech, and old Dad said "no one could never make a speech no how on a full stomic, and all the stomics would be full, or they orter be."

So they would all gather around that Thanksgiving dinner, all feeling that it was to be one of the happiest times of their lives; and no one was disappointed.

Dad Johnson once more hitched up his old hack and approached the parsonage a little before the time appointed for the dinner; he called for John.

"Why Dad, old man," called out John as he came out of the parsonage, "who ordered the hack here? Do you think that I will leave the village before I have that turkey dinner you promised me? No, no, I am too hungry for that."

"Leave town, lad? Whose's sayin' anything about you leavin' town before you git on the outside of that turkey? But come, jump in the hack, and then 'all aboard' for the hall and the turkey!"

John remarked something about his thinking that he was able to walk to the hall, but he guessed he would obey the commands of the village; there was a time, he remarked, when the village obeyed his commands.

The dinner! That Thanksgiving dinner! Who would ever remember the hall with its fever patients, if he had seen that same hall on this Thanksgiving Day? The smell of turkey and of turkey dressing, the rattle of the dishes, knives and forks; the hum of voices; old Johnson's hearty laugh and occasional "Hain't that so, lad John?"—That served a topic for conversation for many years.

Two only of the representative village population were not at the table that day; one whose name was mentioned only in whispers, for whom there was no plate reserved around that happy, well-filled table. Another, Deacon Smith, was also not at the table at the beginning of the dinner; he had left the village for

a few days, but, as he was expected to return on Thanksgiving morning, a place was reserved for him at the table. Now it happened that the deacon could never become quite reconciled to John Montcalm and his "heathen ideers;" but no one cared what the deacon thought, and, if he didn't want to come to the dinner upon his return to the village, why it was only he that was the loser. And thus the deacon was dismissed with a wave of the hand or a snap of the finger. But the deacon was not to be dismissed so summarily, not if he knew himself, and he supposed he did. He returned to Hilldale a very short time before dinner; he was not aware of John's presence in the village, but as soon as he reached his home he heard rumors of the big feast at the hall.

"The feast? What feast? Has the village gone clean crazy that they should be frolicking in the hall?" inquired the deacon.

"Go, see for yourself," piped out old Granny Smith, whose age and decreptitude alone kept her from the hall. The deacon therefore went and saw for himself.

The dinner had only fairly begun, when the Rev. Mr. Whittleby arose from his chair and directed the attention of those around the table

to the door. There they saw the deacon sheepishly peeping through the door.

"Ho, Deacon, how de turkey be smellin' out there? Mebbe you don't want no turkey, standin' there as though you be feered to come in. Come in, Deacon; come in. We won't eat you; we got enough turkey," at which remark of Dad's the hall laughed, but the deacon grew red in his face. The deacon had just gotten inside of the hall; he looked towards the minister, and then for the first time saw John Montcalm. Would he eat his Thanksgiving dinner at a table with a publican and sinner? That is what his look signified to the minister. It was the chance for which the minister was waiting, and he began to address the crowd around the tables, all the time looking squarely at the old deacon, who was beginning to feel decidedly uncomfortable in the conspicuous position thus forced upon him.

"My dear village people," the minister began, "I have a few words to say, though I am fully aware that speeches are not on the menu for this happy dinner. But I shall say what I have to say knowing that we all shall continue our dinner with better appetites,"—Dad remarked that his appetite could not be any bet-

ter—"after it has been said. We have for a guest to-day, John Montcalm, the young man of whom the whole village is proud this day. There was a time, and you all remember it well, when many of us shared the opinion which I fear our good friend, the Deacon,—there, Deacon, is the seat reserved for you,— still holds, concerning him. To-day we must be honest and confess that when John,—yes, you may all applaud his name,—first came upon us, many of us feared that we were entertaining a wolf in sheep's clothing. But I need go no further, for I see that your appetites have already increased. I need not tell you, good people, that I believe as I always have believed, and that I am still preaching to my people the gospel as it is revealed to me. But I have learned, and I am still learning, and believe me, the lesson, coming as it does so late in life, is a hard one—, that we do not all see with the same eyes, that we do not all judge with the same judgment. I have this only to say in conclusion, therefore, that in our future dealings with men let us all remember the words of the good Master, the great and good Leader,

"'*By their fruits ye shall know them.*'"

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